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Frank Reade, Jr.,

IN JAPAN WITH HIS WAR CRUISER OF THE CLOUDS.

By "NONAME."



"Lower the ship, Barney!" cried Frank. "I am going to save that plucky fellow." The order was obeyed. The airship swept down close to the struggling Jap. A rope was thrown him and he was quickly dangling in the air.

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Frank Reade, Jr., In Japan

WITH HIS War Cruiser of the Clouds.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Under the Yellow Sea," "Frank Reade, Jr.'s Prairie Whirlwind; or, The Mystery of the Hidden Canyon," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

A DARING RESCUE—THE JAPANESE ENVOY.

It had been long rumored that Frank Reade, Jr., of Readestown, U. S. A., the world's most famous youthful inventor, was hard at work upon a new invention. Just what it was, however, no one could seem to find out.

The Electric Air-Ship, the Submarine Boat and other wonderful productions of his genius had startled the country and created a new era in the line of modes of travel. Therefore it was not strange that everybody awaited with interest the outcome of this new venture.

The great shops at Readestown, where the machines were perfected, were veiled in deepest mystery. The sharpest and most prying of reporters could not even gain an inkling of the truth.

The keenest of them all, Mr. Vandyke Tattle of the Associated Press, in vain besieged the place.

Tattle was more than ordinarily interested in the invention. To a friend he earnestly declared:

"It is the one end and aspiration of my life to secure the privilege of accompanying Frank Reade, Jr., upon his next trip. I would present the incidents to the world in so vivid a manner that my fortune would surely be made."

"There is but one way by which you can accomplish that end," replied the friend, who was also a personal acquaintance of the distinguished inventor.

"Ah, indeed! pray tell me!" cried Vandyke Tattle, eagerly.

"If you can succeed in doing him some special favor, or gain his gratitude I think you will succeed!"

From that moment Tattle devoted himself to the gaining of that end. It did not seem easy, but the Fates happily sided with him and the chance came.

Frank Reade, Jr., spent most of his time at the shops. He generally left there for his home at an early hour in the evening. Wherever he went he was always accompanied by two faithful servants; a colored man named Pomp and a shock-headed Irishman called Barney O'Shea. They were his companions upon all of his famous travels in air and under sea.

Upon the evening in question his brougham was in waiting at the yard gate. Barney O'Shea was upon the box and Pomp was beside him.

They were chaffing each other in their usual fashion. Despite the fact that they were really the warmest of friends they were always in a wrangle.

"Begorra, wan wud think this seat was med for noone but yersilf, naygur!" growled Barney. "Wud yez sit over or will I be obliged to injooce ye?"

"Huh! Wha' am yo' talkin' about, I'sh?" sputtered the dorky; "dar am moh room on yo' side den on mine!"

"Don't yez tell me that, naygur!" growled Barney. "Bejabers, it's no manners yez have!"

"Don' yo' be so sassy, I'sh!"

They glared at each other, and then Barney essayed to shove Pomp off the box. There would, no doubt, have been some excitement then and there, but for the sudden appearance of Frank Reade, Jr.

The young inventor shouted:

"Hello, Barney and Pomp! The big air ship is finished!"

Each gave a cry of joy.

"Yez don't mean it, Mистер Frank?"

"Golly, amn't dat jolly!"

"Yes," cried Frank, "and we shall soon be exploring Japan. But I am tired and hungry. Get me home at once, Barney!"

"All roight, sor!"

Clang went the door of the brougham, and away went the spirited horses. Just beyond the shops was a steep hill. Upon one side was an embankment one hundred feet down into the river.

Was it Fate? Suddenly the rein on the off horse gave way. Barney O'Shea gave a cry of horror.

"Howly murder!" he screamed, "it's lost we are! Jump, Mистер Frank!"

Uncontrolled the spirited steeds bounded away down the hill. A moment more and they would have been over the embankment. Death would have been a certainty for all.

But a man upon the sidewalk below saw the whole terrible thing. He stood directly in the path of the horses. One moment only he hesitated.

Mr. Vandyke Tattle, for he it was, knew well that it would be madness to stand in the path of those uncontrollable steeds. No human hand could hope to reach their bits and stop them in that manner.

Quick as a flash Tattle pulled a revolver from a side pocket. He was a dead shot. Crack!

Straight to the mark went the bullet. The off horse fell. His fall brought the other to a stop. Instantly the intrepid reporter had him by the bits.

At the moment all were upon the very brink of the embankment. There was no doubt but that a moment's hesitation upon Tattle's part would have caused the death of all three occupants of the brougham.

The sensations experienced by Frank

Reade, Jr., can therefore be well imagined as he crawled out of the wreck and faced his rescuer.

One moment Tattle stood face to face with the famous inventor. Their eyes met frankly. From that moment they were instinctive friends. Both were perfectly cool.

"You stopped the horses?" asked Frank. "It was my good fortune," replied the young reporter.

"We were nearly over the edge."

"Yes—a close call."

"I owe you my life."

"I am overjoyed to have been the means of saving a life so valuable."

Frank looked keenly at the other.

"You are a stranger in Readestown?"

"Yes," replied the newspaper man.

"This is my card."

Frank glanced at the pasteboard. He smiled and said:

"I trust your name belies you."

"It is suggestive of my profession perhaps," said Tattle, with a laugh.

"Very good," said Frank, genially. "Mr. Tattle, I cannot allow so great a favor as you have done me to go unrepaid. Whatever you desire I will gladly grant you."

Tattle's face flushed eagerly, and he with difficulty restrained himself. It was upon his lips to at once name his greatest wish, but sober second thought impelled him to reply:

"I ask only one favor and that you may easily grant. Favor me with an interview at your earliest opportunity."

"Let it be to-night then," said Frank, consulting his watch. "Two hours from now come to my house."

Tattle could hardly contain himself.

Such success he had hardly dared hope for. He was thrilled with great joy.

Barney had in the meantime summoned a carriage and Frank Reade, Jr., now was driven away. Tattle watched the carriage out of sight, and then drawing a deep breath turned away.

"My good fortune has not deserted me," he declared. "I feel that I am upon the eve of great events."

Frank Reade, Jr., was driven straight home and partook of the evening meal with his wife, a talented and accomplished lady. Then he retired at once to his library.

Upon a table were spread great maps and charts of the Orient. For many years Frank had contemplated a visit to this interesting part of the world.

"It should be a field of rare interest and illimitable resource," he declared. "I trust

that we shall enjoy the journey in the Air Dragon."

Upon the table was a letter which had come in Frank's absence. The young inventor opened it. His face brightened.

"It is from Dr. Vaneyke," he said. "Dear old friend! I shall be glad to see him."

Thus the letter, dated at Washington, D. C., read:

"DEAR FRANK:

"Your glowing description of the Air Dragon has filled me with unbounded enthusiasm and a desire to accept your kind invitation to travel with you to the Orient in the interests of science. You may expect me in Readestown at an early day. With assurances of my deepest esteem,

"Your friend always,

"VANEYKE."

Frank laid the letter upon the table and was about to consult the charts again, when a tap came at the door.

"Come!" he said sharply.

It opened and Pomp appeared. The darky scraped and bowed.

"If yo' please, Marse Frank!" he declared, "dar am a gemmen from Japan to see yo' in de odder room!"

"A gentleman from Japan!" exclaimed Frank in surprise. "Who is he?"

"Donno sah! here am his card."

Frank took the pasteboard and read:

"MUT SU MISHIMA,

Envoy of His Majesty

The Emperor of Japan."

Frank passed a hand across his eyes. He was puzzled.

"What the mischief is all this?" he muttered. "An envoy from the Emperor of Japan! What does he want? Can it be that he has an idea that I intend to visit his country?"

It was a matter of deep mystery to Frank. But he at once realized that the best way to solve it was to give the envoy an audience.

A few moments later the Japanese nobleman was politely bowing before the famous young inventor.

He was quite tall for a Jap, with a very intelligent face, and dressed with scrupulous care. He talked excellent English.

"I have come to see you upon a very important mission, Mr. Reade," he said. "I represent my sovereign and have authority from him to discuss with you a very secret and grave matter."

"Indeed!" said Frank, wonderingly. "May I ask what it is?"

"First let me apprise you of the fact, which may not be known to you perhaps, that a great crisis at present exists in the Orient."

"A crisis?"

"Yes, this very day war has been declared between my country and our natural foe and oppressor, China."

Frank was astounded. For a few moments he could not speak, but sat quite still and stared at Mut Su.

"War between China and Japan!" he finally muttered, "that means the dawning of a new era for both those nations, so long enshrouded in darkness!"

CHAPTER II.

THE BESIEGED COLONY—THE NEW AIR-SHIP.

"You forget!" said the Japanese envoy, with dignity. "Japan has long enjoyed the privileges of western civilization."

"True!" agreed Frank, heartily. "It is in every moral and intellectual sense superior to China. I assure you, sir, that my sympathies are with your people."

"Thank you!" replied Mut Su, joyfully. "I felt sure of that. If my errand proves successful, then I shall have gained a great end for my people and won their gratitude."

"And that errand—"

"I will tell you!" continued Mut Su.

"Of course you know that the feud between China and Japan concerns Corea, and is an old and bitter one."

"It is natural that we should desire to make our victory over China as decisive and complete as possible—"

"But," interrupted Frank, "is it not temerity in you to seek a war with a nation which so far outnumbers you?"

Mut Su smiled.

"You forget," he said, "that there is almost the difference in superiority between our people and those dogs of Chinese as between your best trained soldiers and the red men of your Wild West."

"Japan has made rapid strides in ten years. We have a wonderful navy and appliances of warfare of modern kind as well as trained troops. The Chinese are a horde of untrained, brainless wretches."

Frank saw the force of this argument, but yet was inclined to entertain a strong doubt.

He knew that China was one of the most powerful of nations, so far as numbers went. Doubtless Japanese soldiers were superior.

But the Chinese Emperor, with his limitless resources, could continue to pour hordes of semi-barbarians into Japan for years. How long the latter country could continue effective resistance was a strong question. Yet he was too polite to intimate all this to Mut Su.

"The fame of the American inventor and his wonderful air-ships has reached Japan," declared the envoy. "It has become known to the emperor. I am empowered to offer you the title of a prince and any sum of money you may name for an air-ship which you shall construct for the purpose of sailing over China and blowing her into perdition."

Frank sat quite still, and looked askance at the charts upon the table. He understood now the errand of the envoy. He also knew well that he must perforce refuse it.

"Then that is your errand here, Mut Su?" he asked.

"It is. What have you to say?"

"I may as well be blunt and tell you right now, that is impossible for me to accept your terms."

Mut Su's face fell.

"What?" he exclaimed, lugubriously. "You will not build the air ship?"

"I cannot."

"What shall I tell my emperor?"

"Tell him that it would violate the laws of nations. I am an American citizen and must be neutral. My government would not allow me to build an aerial warship for you."

"But—you can build it in Japan!" said the envoy, persuasively.

"Impossible! I can take no side in your controversy. I can sympathize with you but little more than with China. Certainly not enough to build you an air-ship."

Mut Su's face was long and his disappointment exceedingly great. Yet his strong sense of politeness would not allow him to press the matter.

"I am disappointed," he said. "My emperor felt sure of you. This is your final decision?"

"It must be."

Mut Su arose to go.

"You shall see," he cried, "that Japan will whip China despite the difference in size. Our people are brave."

"I certainly wish your nation the best of fortune," replied Frank. "Better than all I hope you may be able to settle the controversy in a peaceful manner."

But before more could be said the door opened and Pomp appeared with a silver salver.

"Suah it am a gemmen to see yo', Marse Frank," he said. "Yer am his card."

Frank glanced at the card:

"ALBERT WESTON,

"American Board of Foreign Missions."

"A missionary!" cried Frank. "Show him in, Pomp."

"A'right, sah!"

A moment later the door opened, and a tall, ministerial gentleman entered the room.

He glanced at Mut Su and then at Frank.

"Is this Mr. Frank Reade, Jr.?" he asked.

"It is," replied Frank.

"I have come to see you upon a matter of the greatest importance. It concerns human lives which are in jeopardy in far away Japan. I am sure that you are the only person in the world who can give them rescue."

"Rescue!" exclaimed Frank. "Are they then in such peril?"

"Besieged by Chinese in the small town of Yashu on the coast of Japan. There are three hundred souls in the little colony—all Americans. The Chinese have threatened to cut them all in pieces, as they are in sympathy with the Japanese."

"Right!" cried Mut Su. "The same report reached me. Yashu and its colony are in deadly peril. You are a missionary, sir?"

"I am," replied Weston. "And you—"

"I am Envoy of the Emperor of Japan."

"I believe your people are friendly to the colony."

"Certainly! it is the Chinese who threaten their extermination. Now, Mr. Reade, you have an excuse for coming to Japan with your air-ship."

"No," said Frank, "that is a question for the U. S. Government to settle. You should appeal to them."

"It would be too late," almost shrieked Weston. "I tell you, the circumstances are very desperate. Help must reach them quickly. Before a government cruiser could be sent there they will perish."

Frank was thrilled instantly.

"But—how can I help them?" he asked.

"Your air-ship. Go there quickly and break the siege. Drive the cowardly Chinese away and save your countrymen. I bring an appeal from the best people of our land. You will not refuse?"

Weston was almost dramatic. Frank was deeply impressed. His face paled and horror came into his heart.

"That is dreadful!" he said. "The whole colony are at the mercy of blood-thirsty fiends."

"Aye!" cried Weston, forcibly. "You must not refuse, Mr. Reade. It is a duty you owe suffering humanity."

Frank sprang up.

"I will not refuse," he cried. "It is my duty and I will go!"

"Perhaps when you get there you will see the justice of helping Japan!" cried Mut Su, joyfully.

"That will be a matter for future consideration," replied Frank. "I will start at once. My new air-ship the 'Air Dragon' is all equipped. I was just going to start for a tour across Japan."

"Then you will have a worthy object in view!" cried Weston. "I will at once send a message as quickly as possible that you are on the way. But—this wonderful air-ship—I have a great curiosity to see it."

"And you shall!" cried Frank. "You shall be the first."

"May I be permitted?" asked Mut Su.

"Certainly."

Frank pulled a bell and Barney made his appearance.

"Bring around the coupe, Barney," he commanded. "We are going down to the shops to look at the Air Dragon?"

"All right, sor!" cried Barney, as he hastened away with alacrity.

Soon the carriage was at the door. Frank had forgotten his appointment with Tattle, the reporter, who had saved his life. But just at this opportune moment he appeared on the scene.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Frank, "if you will wait, Mr. Tattle, I will return very shortly. Or perhaps you would like to take a look at the Air-Dragon."

Tattle gave a convulsive gasp.

"Would I?" he exclaimed. "Why that's worth a cool thousand to me. I've been here weeks trying to gain that end."

"Then jump in with us!"

All entered the carriage. Frank introduced Tattle to the others, and long before the shops were reached, all were upon the most friendly terms.

Tattle was much taken with Mut Su, and unqualifiedly declared his sympathy with Japan.

"I shall sail for Tokio to-morrow!" declared the envoy. "All Japan will be on the lookout for the Air-Dragon!"

The shops were reached and all entered by the big gates. As it was a trifle dark, Frank touched a spring and instantly electric lights made all about as plain as day.

In the great dome roofed building was the latest triumph of inventive skill, the Air-Dragon.

A brief description of the great air-ship

will not be out of place here. The visitors gazed at it wonder-struck.

The hull was something on the lines of a barque, with high stern, sharp bow and broad keel. It was constructed of the lightest of thin rolled but very tough steel.

The air-ship had the appearance of great lightness, but was also extremely strong and buoyant, and capable of carrying great weight.

Its support in the air consisted of huge sail like wings forward, made of a peculiar quality of thin but tough rubber cloth, and a mighty rotascope in the stern, capable of many hundred revolutions per minute and consequently a tremendous lifting power.

The rotascope was manufactured of ingeniously contrived revolving flanges of firmest and thinnest steel. Its power was something incredible.

The motive force of wings and rotascope was furnished by powerful electric engines, the invention and secret of Frank Reade, Jr.

The propelling power of the air-ship was furnished by a light four-bladed screw under the stern where also was the rudder for steering the craft.

A model of beauty was the Air Dragon so far as architectural lines went. The decks were all protected by little polished guard rails. In the side of the hull were plate glass windows, and the prow was a marvelous bit of steel work representing the head of a dragon, with a long ram projecting from the forehead.

The Air Dragon also carried an armament fit to really denominate her a "Cruiser of the Clouds." There were three electric guns.

These were placed, two in a conning tower upon each side of the air-ship, and one upon the stern deck.

They were weapons of more than ordinary construction and scope, and worthy a detailed description.

CHAPTER III.

BOUND FOR JAPAN—THE NAVAL BATTLE.

ORDINARY cannon of their length could not have been supported in mid-air by the air ship.

But these electric guns were not heavy, but made of thin rolled steel, being nothing more nor less than thin pneumatic tubes, from which powerful dynamite projectiles were discharged and exploded by means of electricity.

One of these projectiles could blow a wooden ship out of the water, and make great impression upon an iron-clad.

All these points were explained by Frank Reade, Jr., and now he said:

"But let us now take a look at the interior of the Air Dragon."

Mut Su drew a deep breath, and said:

"Oh, you Americans are wonderful people. You will revolutionize the world yet."

Vandyke Tattle was busy with his note-book. Weston, the missionary, was deep in study.

They now crossed the deck and entered the cabin of the air-ship. At once they were enchained by the cozy and beautiful fittings of this.

There were beautiful divans of costly silk and plush, furniture of expensive make, bric-a-brac and the appointments of a rich apartment.

From one part of the ship's interior to another they went.

Into the state-rooms, tidily kept, the galley where Pomp served up delicious dainties, the gun-room where all kinds of light arms were kept, and finally the engine-room where were the marvelous electric engines which were the real secret of the great invention.

When the last detail of the air-ship was explained, Tattle closed his note-book with a snap.

"I've got all!" he said, "there is no wonder on earth to-day to equal Frank Reade, Jr.'s air-ship."

"Amen!" said Weston, the missionary. "Now may God speed him in his errand of mercy!"

A few moments later Mut Su and Weston took their departure. The former was

immediately en route for Japan and the other for New York.

But the reporter, Tattle, lingered, and Frank Reade, Jr.'s keen wit had enabled him to guess the reason why. Tattle was not one to beat about a bush, however, so he at once blurted forth:

"Mr. Reade, I claim no obligation for the paltry turn I did you a few hours ago, but—"

"Wait," said Frank. "The obligation is one of the greatest kind and I shall accord you any favor you ask, and I know that you have one in mind."

Tattle gazed at Frank an instant and brought his fist down upon the table vigorously.

"By thunder, you are the kind of a man I like!" he cried, forcibly. "And you'll tell me my fate at once, and I'll not kick even if you go against me. I want to go to Japan with you aboard the Air-Dragon!"

There was a moment of silence; Frank looked steadily at the other. Then he smiled, and said:

"You shall go!"

Tattle snapped his thumbs, whirled about twice, and then made a dive forward and embraced Frank.

"I'm the happiest man on earth!" he cried. "My fortune is made! I'll slave for you! I'll die for you!"

"That's all right!" laughed Frank. "Be on hand by Thursday of this week. We will start then."

Insane with joy, Tattle rushed away to the telegraph office. The next morning the whole country knew that Frank Reade, Jr., was going to the rescue of an American colony in Japan with his war cruiser of the clouds, the Air-Dragon.

Of course the whole country was agog with interest.

When the day came for the Air-Dragon to start, the voyagers, Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp, Dr. Vaneyke, and Vandyke Tattle stood on her deck and heard the booming of cannon and the plaudits of thousands.

The air-ship rose from the yards of the machine shops and mounted a thousand feet above Readestown.

Flaps were waved from the deck, bands of music played below, and Frank fired a salute from the dynamite guns, the bomb being so timed that it exploded in mid-air, with grand effect.

"Good-bye to Readestown," cried Frank as he stepped into the pilot house. "It will be a long while before we shall see her again."

"Perhaps never," added Dr. Vaneyke. "Don't say that," cried Tattle, cheerily. "I tell you the expedition of the Dragon is going to be a success."

Dr. Vaneyke and Tattle had become the warmest of friends.

The aged scientist was at once much taken with the brilliant young newspaper man.

The Air Dragon at once started westward toward San Francisco as the nearest route to the Orient.

And now wonderful indeed was the experience of the aerial voyagers.

The air-ship floated in space like a feather. With the force of her propeller she could drive ahead at a tremendous rate of speed.

One moment the earth would be visible below in one mighty panorama of nature's wonders; then the air-ship would glide into a cloud bank, only to reappear a few moments later.

The great peaks of the Rockies were passed over, and the great Alkali deserts of Nevada to the great Sierras.

Finally the Pacific Ocean burst into view. It was one morning early, just as the golden orb of day glinted its rays over the sparkling waters.

It was an inspiring sight, and brought a cheer from the lips of all.

The cities of San Francisco and Sacramento were passed over without a stop. Frank knew the necessity of getting to Japan as quickly as possible.

For days the blue waters of the Pacific lay beneath them.

Like a mighty bird of passage the great air-ship flew on. Islands and archipelagoes were sighted and passed, and one day a long coast broke into view.

Frank, who was on the quarter deck, was approached by Tattle, who said:

"Is not that the coast of Japan?"

"Of Corea!" replied Frank. "We are in Japanese waters."

The young reporter drew a deep breath. "Then we are close upon the scene of action?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Frank, "from this on we may expect thrilling incidents."

Far below, upon the tranquil waters, were lateen sailed craft. They were Japanese vessels. It was evident that they were in the Orient at last.

Frank had been carefully engaged in taking his bearings. As they approached the coast there was seen a distant town upon a large and spacious harbor. The town rose in terraces from the sea.

It was protected by forts at the entrance. The harbor seemed filled with vessels of varied description.

And as the air-ship drew nearer to the scene a great cloud of smoke seemed to rise above the vessels and the booming of guns was plainly heard.

"Look!" cried Tattle, wildly, "it is a naval battle. There are Japanese men-o'-war and Chinese junks. It is a hot fight."

This was true.

It was the good fortune of the Air Dragon to arrive upon the scene just in time to witness the greatest naval encounter yet of the Oriental war.

The little town, Frank knew, was Koshu, upon the Korean coast. The Chinese fleet, of full twenty vessels, had dared to attack the Japanese war-ships.

The forts were also taking part in the contest. The scene was grand beyond all description.

"Upon my word," cried Dr. Vaneyke, "we could not be in a better position to view such a battle."

"You are right," cried Tattle, who was busy with his note-book; "but it looks to me as if Japan was getting the best of it. There goes a Chinese ship to the bottom."

This was true.

One of the Chinese ships at that moment went down. The water was filled with struggling wretches. But at this moment the Air Dragon became greatly imperiled.

It had drifted over the scene, and none on board but had felt secure at that altitude. But without warning the forts suddenly opened fire upon the air ship by depressing their heavy guns.

The air about the Dragon suddenly became alive with bursting shells and hurtling shot. If the air ship should be struck the chances were that it would fall, and the result be awful to contemplate. It was a moment of terrible peril.

CHAPTER IV.

A TIMELY RESCUE.

THE danger which threatened the Air-Dragon at that moment was indeed terrible. The air about her was literally filled with flying shell and shot.

Doubtless the Korean forts had taken her for some contrivance of the Chinese, and were disposed to annihilate her without delay.

"Heavens!" cried Dr. Vaneyke, "they mean to bring us down, Frank!"

"We are lost!" cried Tattle.

It was a sublime and awful moment. But Frank Reade, Jr., had nerves of steel.

He sprang into the pilot house and pressed the rotascope lever. Up shot the air-ship like a meteor.

Up and up until far beyond range, and the little town of Koshu looked like a speck so far below, and the sounds of the guns were faint and distant.

Lucky indeed was the escape of the air-ship. Had one of the deadly shells struck her, it would have sealed the fate of all on board. But very fortunately this did not happen.

Frank let the air-ship drift to the northward until the scene of the battle was no longer directly underneath. Then he allowed her to drop a few hundred feet.

They were now out of range. The scene of contest could be very plainly seen. For a time it was watched with interest. Then Frank said:

"Well, friends, suppose we go on down the coast. There is nothing to be gained by staying here!"

"You are right, Frank!" cried Tattle, "and we have come desperately near losing our air-ship into the bargain. I say let us go on."

"So say I!" cried Dr. Vaneyke.

"All right," said Frank; "start the Dragon ahead, Barney."

Barney, who was in the pilot-house, at once complied with this request. The Air-Dragon started southward and along the coast. Koshu and its naval strife was left far behind. But new scenes and incidents were at hand.

The air-ship had left the sea and was now sailing over some bluffs directly inland, when Tattle, who had been watching the country below, suddenly gave a startled cry:

"Frank! come quick! On my word, there's the mischief to pay down there!"

In an instant the young inventor was by the air-ship's rail.

He saw what had caused Tattle's excited remark, and his bosom thrilled with horror.

There, with his back against a cliff, was a man, dressed in European garb and plainly not a native of China, holding a dozen furious Celestials at bay.

He wielded a huge Japanese sword of the pattern carried by the soldiery, and was making a bold bid for his life against the fearful odds.

The assailants were all armed with Chinese swords and shields, and were trying to get under their foe's guard and kill him.

It was a magnificent defensive battle which he was putting up against such odds.

In an instant he, of course, had the sympathy of all on board the air-ship.

"He looks like an American," cried Tattle, wildly.

"Begorra, it's a foighter he is! Have at the omadhouns."

"He is certainly one of our countrymen!" cried Frank; "his life must be saved. Quick! Get the Winchesters!"

Pomp and Barney had already gone for these. Instantly each voyager picked a man.

The crack of the Winchesters laid half of the yellow miscreants low. The remainder looked up in consternation, and saw the air-ship.

They waited not on the order of going, but fled incontinently. Their superstitious fears were fully aroused.

Astounded, the erstwhile beleaguered man gazed at the air-ship for some moments without moving from his traps. His wonderful rescue was to him like a veritable miracle.

"Hello, friend!" shouted Tattle. "We came up just in the nick of time, didn't we? Don't be afraid of us. We are Americans like yourself!"

"Great Jupiter!" gasped he of the big sword. "Where in the world did you come from, and who are you, and what sort of a rig-a-ma-jig is that you have there?"

"Do you mean this air-ship?"

"Air-ship? Well, I'm beat! It is an air-ship and the solution of aerial navigation is solved. Am I awake or am I dreaming?"

"Pinch yourself and see!" laughed Tattle; "but wait a moment and we'll come down and talk with you."

"Do, by all means!"

The air-ship lightly touched the ground. Frank and the newspaper correspondent sprang to the ground.

They advanced and offered their hands to the rescued man, who was seen to be young, tall, and handsome as an Apollo.

"The pleasure is mine, gentlemen," he said, courteously. "My name is Alfred Lee, and I am agent of an American firm of importers in Pekin."

"I am Frank Reade, Jr.," said Frank. "My residence is in Readestown, U. S. A." "And I am Vandyke Tattle, correspondent for the American Press," said that worthy, cordially.

At this moment Dr. Vaneyke appeared and was also introduced.

In a few moments all were well acquainted and upon the very best of terms.

Lee told his story succinctly.

"I am on my way to Yashu," he said. "That is a small colony of our people

twenty miles below here where there has been much trouble with the ignorant and idolatrous class of Chinese. In fact, the place is at present besieged, and there is great danger that all the people will be massacred."

"We've hit the right place!" cried Tattle. "We're in luck, Frank. Have courage, Mr. Lee; we have come all the way from America to help your people."

"Is that so?" cried the importer eagerly. "It is," replied Frank.

"Who sent you?"

"We came by the urgent request of the Missionary Society of which Mr. Albert Weston is the head in New York."

"Did Weston send you?" cried Lee joyfully. "God bless him! Why, it is the salvation of our people! With this air-ship of yours you can frighten and subdue the whole riotous gang of heathens!"

"We will try it," said Frank, grimly. "But how did you get into the scrape with these rascals, Mr. Lee?"

"Why, I met them on the cliff, and they feigned friendship until quite near me. Then one of them aimed a blow at me with his sword. I got a position here against this rock, but could only act on the defensive, and would have been surely killed had you not arrived."

"Well, I am glad that we were able to render you the service!" declared Frank, heartily. "We are now on our way to the relief of Yashu."

"Good! Then I will go ahead as fast as possible and meet you there."

"Are you not afraid of encountering more of the foe?"

"I must take my chances. There is a villa just below here, the home of a wealthy mandarin of the first class. Perhaps I can get his protection, and he may give me a body guard to Yashu."

"Then the better class of Chinese are not prejudiced against our people?"

"By no means. It is the common herd. But the mandarins and all Chinese officials are powerless just now. Why, the empire seems panic-stricken."

"It seems to me a grave necessity that foreigners and their property should be protected," said Frank. "That will give me work to do with my air ship while I am here. I have a plan, Mr. Lee. It is twenty miles to Yashu, and too risky for you to go thither alone and on foot. Get aboard the air ship and I will take you thither."

A glad cry escaped Lee's lips.

"Mr. Reade, you are a philanthropist!" he cried. "It will be noble work which you will do, and you will reap your reward!"

"I ask no reward," said Frank, "but get aboard all. Let us lose no time in getting to Yashu."

The words had barely left his lips, when a startling thing happened.

The sharp crack of rifles rose on the air. Bullets whistled all about the voyagers, but fortunately nobody was hurt.

The attack came from a clump of palms near, and was a thrilling surprise.

It was evident that the Chinese rioters had returned with fire-arms, and meant to give battle to the strange flying machine and its occupants. With excited tones Frank cried:

"Aboard all, for your lives!"

Instantly the order was obeyed. Once in the cabin of the Air-Dragon, they were safe enough.

"Where are the treacherous dogs?" cried Tattle, excitedly picking up his Winchester. "Give me a shot at them!"

"Barney had pressed the rotoscope lever, however, and the Air-Dragon sprang upward."

This revealed the Chinese miscreants in the cover below. It was an exposed position for them and they started to run.

The voyagers kept up a hot fire after them until at length they gained the cover of a cavern in the cliffs.

Then the Air-Dragon went on, and speedily left them behind.

Twenty miles would be speedily covered by the fleet air-ship.

Indeed, the little depression in which lay the town of Yashu could already be seen.

But an incident for a time diverted the Air-Dragon from descending upon the little town.

Yashu was situated upon the banks of a little river which ran into the sea. Suddenly smoke was seen rising from the bosom of this river and a shell was seen to burst in air over the town.

Lee's face turned deadly pale.

"Heavens!" he cried, "the fiends have got into the old fort at the point, and probably captured a mortar boat which was anchored there under a small guard. They are bombarding the town."

This seemed a certain fact.

Shell after shell was rising in the air and falling into the distance. But so far they had not done much damage.

However, the gunners were getting the range. They must soon succeed, and then the carnage would be terrible.

It certainly looked as if the little colony of foreigners would be wiped from the face of the earth if they did not receive succor soon.

But this was close at hand.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIGHT ON THE PLAIN.

"THEY are certainly bombarding the town, Frank!" cried Tattle. "What shall we do?"

"We'll put an end to that pretty quick," said the young inventor, grimly.

He at once headed the air-ship for the river. It was distant yet some fifteen miles.

But these were covered as fast as the flight of the eagle, and it was not long before the whole panorama was spread to the view of the voyagers.

There was the old fort and the mortar boat. A gang of the rioters had possession of all.

They were loading the mortar when the air-ship caught their gaze.

That its appearance created a sensation goes without saying.

The whole murderous crew gaped and stared at the spectacle. But they did not fly in terror.

Far from it.

The Celestial is a natural juggler and conjurer, and not given in general to credulity in matters of a sort so wonderful.

The air-ship, though they had never seen its like, might be a huge kite, or some trick of a conjuring foe. They realized their own peril and at once acted for their own defense.

"Look out!" cried Tattle, wildly, "they have drawn a line upon us with that mortar."

This was true.

The mortar had been instantly elevated and aimed at the air-ship. The yellow rascals meant to bring it down, or expose what they considered a clever trick.

"Look out, Barney!" shrieked Frank. "Get out of range."

The Celt made as quick action as possible. But the Chinese were quicker.

The big mortar exploded. Up came a shell with a time fuse, and it narrowly missed striking the air-ship.

As it was it burst some three hundred feet above the Air-Dragon. For a moment the racket was terrible, and the air was full of flying particles of iron.

All on the deck had dodged into the cabin, and this was lucky or some of the particles of shell would have struck them.

As it was much serious damage was done. A part of the deck guard rail was blown away, one of the rotoscope flanges was shattered, several times the thin steel shell of the hull was perforated, and it was indeed a wonder that the air-ship had not been completely riddled.

It was a perfect shower of missiles that hurtled about it.

Barney in the pilot-house had pulled the propeller lever wide open, so that the ship had shot forward.

But not for a great ways. It came to an instant stop, and the whole structure began to waver.

Instantly the thrilling truth dawned upon Frank.

"We are sinking!" screamed Tattle.

The wildest of excitement reigned for a few moments.

Frank Reade, Jr., was the coolest party on board. He at once started for the engine room.

A glance at the machinery was sufficient

to show him the cause for the Air-Dragon's unsteadiness.

A particle of the shell had penetrated the casing of the partition and had bent a parallel rod so that the machinery was brought to a stop.

The huge wings and the rotascope ceased to revolve and the air-ship was falling with the wings extended like a parachute to let it down gently.

The dynamos were buzzing furiously. Frank hastened to check their speed and then rushed out on deck.

To his joy he saw that the air-ship was not likely to fall into the river.

"We are done for, Frank!" cried Tattle, with pallid face. "These heathens will batter us to pieces now!"

But Frank was cool. He gave one critical glance at the scene below and said:

"I think not!"

"Then you see a way out of it!" cried the newspaper correspondent, eagerly.

"Look out!" shouted Dr. Vaneyke at this moment. "They mean to annihilate us!"

Indeed it seemed so. The mortar had again been trained upon the air-ship.

Boom! crash!

The big shell, however, rose far above the air-ship and describing a parabola burst a great distance beyond so that no harm was done.

"I'll stop that," gritted Frank.

He rushed to the electric gun and would have trained it upon the mortar and its crew.

A shot from it would have terminated the trouble at once. But unfortunately an incident prevented this.

The air-ship had sunk too far to allow the gun to be trained directly upon the mortar.

A high headland also cut off the aim so that for the nonce the rascals were safe.

But several thousand of them came swarming over the ridges as the air-ship settled down.

They came on in a savage horde anxious to be the first to reach their intended prey.

Below was a clump of trees. Fortunately the air-ship just evaded these. Had she landed in their branches the result might have been serious.

Frank was at the rail anxiously viewing the situation. With a lunge the Air-Dragon swayed forward and struck the ground.

There was hardly enough buoyancy in the wings to prevent quite a rude shock.

Things were shaken up somewhat, but no harm was done.

The air-ship rested upon quite a smooth piece of ground. One fortunate thing, she was out of range of the mortar, or at least for a time.

Yet Frank was not oblivious to the fact that the mortar would soon be throwing shells over into the plain where the air-ship was.

But this he knew could not happen while the Celestials were coming in such a large body to attack the Air Dragon.

At once the young inventor saw what his course should be.

This must be to repair the damaged parallel rod and get the Air-Dragon afloat again before another bombardment could be made.

But first of all, the furious attack of the foot soldiers must be repulsed.

They were coming down upon the air-ship like a whirlwind.

Barney and Pomp, Vandyke Tattle and Dr. Vaneyke had all secured their Winchester, and were opening fire upon the assailants even at that range.

Barney and Pomp were in their glory. The two jokers liked nothing better than a lively scrimmage with a foe.

"Golly! jes' yo' see dis chile pop dem yaller critters ober!" cried Pomp as he drew aim. "I'll bet yo' mah hat agin a possum, I'ish, dat I hit him de fust shot."

"Begorra, I'll take yez, naygur!" retorted Barney. "Yez niver cud hit anything. Shure if yez thried to hit the moon yez wud hit the earth instead."

"Hi dar, I'ish! I bet yo' mah life on dat. Huh! don' yo' 'spose I kin shoot better dan dat?"

"Cum now, yez black misfit!" roared Barney. "I'll bet if yez foired at the moon the bullet yez foired would hit the earth

instead, and I'll leave it to Misther Tattle here if I ain't roight!"

"That's right!" replied Tattle solemnly. "What goes up into the air Pomp must come back and hit the earth. No rifle has yet been invented which can send a bullet beyond the limit of gravitation."

Pomp scratched his wool a moment, and then as the inwardness of Barney's jest dawned upon him, he whirled about and made a crack at the Celt which fortunately was dodged.

"Yah, you am too smaht, I'ish!" cried the angry coon. "Yo' bettah luk out fo' yo' wif bust yo' brain wif sich a load on it."

"Arrah there, go an wid yez!" cried Barney, angrily; "this is no toime fer fooling. See the yaller divils comin' fer us loike imps av Satan!"

So the two jokers began firing again at the advancing Celestials with all rapidity. Meanwhile Frank was working on the machinery diligently.

As it would require more than his strength to straighten the parallel bar, and would also require some welding, he decided to remove it entirely and put in a new bar.

As expeditiously as possible, he worked at the job.

The uproar on the deck above was increasing. A perfect fusillade was kept up by the Winchesters.

But the shouts and yells of the Chinese were becoming more audible every moment.

It was evident that they meant to capture the air-ship at all hazards.

Frank suddenly paused in his work and a thrill of indecision and doubt seized him. He was yet far from having his job completed, and now just what he feared happened.

Down the companion-way came the call of alarm in Dr. Vaneyke's voice.

"Frank, they're close upon us! I'm afraid we can't hold them any longer."

The young inventor dropped his tools and sprang up the stairs.

As he reached the deck he beheld a thrilling sight.

There were legions of the Celestials swarming about the air-ship armed with carbines and heavy swords.

The four defenders of the Air Dragon were behind the bulwarks and firing through loopholes as fast as they could load and empty their magazines.

Frank saw that the situation was a most desperate one.

Something decisive must be done at once. Without a moment's thought of the risk, he ran across the deck to the electric gun.

Arrows, bullets and missiles whizzed all about him.

But fortunately none struck him.

The next moment he was at the breach of the gun. He pressed a spring in the deck with his foot and instantly a steel shutter, bullet proof, flew up from the deck.

This protected him upon all sides and also enabled him to operate the pivot upon which was the gun. Pressing another spring the gun turned until its muzzle faced the foe.

Then Frank lifted a small ring in the deck.

Here was a compartment in which were dynamite projectiles. It was but a moment's work to insert one of these in each breach of the gun.

All this had required but a few moments of time. But the Celestials were at the very rail. A moment more and they would be aboard.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BOMBARDMENT.

FRANK knew well that if the yellow fiends once got aboard the air-ship all would be lost.

But he did not intend that this should happen.

In spite of the awful peril he was as cool and systematic as could be.

He depressed the muzzle of the gun, so that the projectile would strike well away from the air ship.

The effects would reach even to the rail,

but it would not do to explode the dynamite too near the Dragon for fear of doing it harm.

All this Frank coolly calculated. Then he pressed the electric spring.

The pneumatic chamber closed with a click, and with a recoil the projectile left the barrel of the gun.

The next moment an earthquake shock was felt, and an unearthly roar filled the air.

Up into the air went scores of the doomed Celestials. From the rail of the air-ship, from the very verge of victory they were torn.

Heaps of dead and dying lay upon the ground. It checked them.

But Frank Reade, Jr., knew how necessary it was to follow up this advantage.

Quick as a flash he fired again, slightly changing his aim. This second bolt of death changed the tide.

The wavering line of Celestials broke and fled incontinently.

Like the waves of the sea they were borne backward. Frank could have annihilated nearly the whole gang.

But he did not care to do this. Unnecessary slaughter was repulsive to him.

He at once returned to the engine-room and resumed his work on the machinery, while his colleagues above continued their fusillade with their Winchesters.

The Celestials had been effectually repulsed.

But this was by no means the end of the affair. Indeed it was only the beginning.

For a time the defeated Chinese remained upon the ridge of land, yelling and discharging their carbines. Then a tall priest in yellow robes suddenly appeared among them, and it could be seen that he was violently exhorting them.

"Golly! I jes wondah wha' dat ole chap am up to?" exclaimed Pomp.

"Begorra! Mebbe he's lecturin' em on the folly of their ways," averred Barney.

But Dr. Vaneyke, who had been studying the situation with a glass, now rejoined:

"It is very easy to see what he is doing. He is trying to make them return the way they came!"

"Begorra, an' phwat is the object av that?" asked Barney.

"I don't know. We shall very soon learn, I think," replied the scientist.

And Dr. Vaneyke's words were prophetic. Suddenly the Chinese vanished to a man. The ridge hid them from view.

Then followed twenty minutes or more of suspense. Not a Celestial was in sight.

While our voyagers were wondering at the new change of plan, the explanation came.

Suddenly the dull boom of the mortar was heard in the distance.

Then up in the air there shot a shell. It hovered for some seconds seemingly over the air-ship.

Then it fell two hundred yards away and exploded with deafening force. All was comprehensive.

"Heavens!" cried Dr. Vaneyke, "they mean to shell us to pieces. They are getting our range, and when they do we are surely lost."

This seemed a certainty.

Another distant boom, and another shell rose in the air. It came a trifle nearer to the Air-Dragon.

Frank came hurriedly on deck.

"Mercy on us, Frank!" cried Tattle, for the first time laying aside his note book. "What shall we do? They mean to blow us to smithereens."

"We'll put a stop to that," said Frank, grimly.

"We will?"

"Yes."

"How, may I ask?"

"Certainly. Keep your eyes and ears open and you will see."

"Have you got that rod replaced?"

"Very nearly. Another half hour's work will do it!"

"They will get our range with those shells before that time."

"Will they?" said Frank, with a grim smile. "Perhaps they will and perhaps they won't!"

With this he went aft to the electric gun. It was but a moment's work for him to

displace a section of the deck and elevate the muzzle of the gun at a proper angle.

His purpose was now seen by all, which was to return the bombardment.

One of the dynamite shells striking within a reasonable distance of the mortar boat would silence it forever.

Of course to get the range was the question. This could only be done by repeated trials.

Frank placed a projectile in the gun and expelled it.

It went sailing over the ridge and a distant thunderous roar was heard.

The mortar shells had been flying about the air-ship thick and fast. Thus far no damage had been done, but they had been coming nearer every moment. The risk was imminent.

It was evident that the first projectile had done no damage to the mortar boat.

Frank shifted the range a little.

He believed that he had over-shot the mark. Watching the puff of smoke from beyond the ridge which accompanied every shot of the Chinese, he got a dead line.

Then he fired as rapidly as possible, drawing the range nearer with every shot.

This was a dead sure way to hit the mark, and the crash came. Suddenly there was a fearful racket beyond the ridge.

Above the summit, fragments of the wreck were seen rising into the air.

Then no more shells came over the ridge. That great peril was done away with.

The defenders of the Air Dragon cheered long and lustily, as they had a right to do.

The victory they had won was a signal one. The Chinese were worsted.

Nobody was more delighted than Vandyke Tattle.

He made pages of notes and then danced and clapped his hands exuberantly.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" he cried, "this is glorious! Six columns in every New York daily, one hundred dollars per column! I tell you it's a rich find. We've licked the heathen Chinese! Yankee pluck! It counts every time!"

Frank now hastily completed his repairs in the engine room. Once more the machinery was in motion.

The air-ship began to rise like a huge bird into the air.

"Now, we will go on to Yashu!" cried Frank. "We'll soon put an end to the row there."

Everybody was on the tiptoe of interest and excitement.

The air-ship had hardly cleared the screening ridge of land, however, when all eyes were turned upon Yashu.

Then a great cry went up.

"They have fired the town!"

Indeed, so it looked.

Great columns of smoke were surging upwards, and the distant crack of guns was plainly heard.

Evidently the Chinese had made a fierce descent upon the colony, and meant to wipe it at once out of existence.

No time was to be lost. The air-ship shot forward at a rapid rate of speed.

Every moment she drew nearer to the scene of action; and now all burst upon the view of the excited aerial voyagers.

Yashu was a picturesque little town, built half out into the river upon floating rafts. The houses were all of the light character peculiar to China.

The landward side of the town was guarded by a high and strong wall. This was defended by the white colonists and the better class of Chinese who were their allies.

The battle raging at the gates of Yashu was a terrific one. The air-ship quickly bore down upon the scene. Thrilling developments were at hand.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FOE BEATEN OFF.

TOGETHER at the gates of Yashu the mandarins and high officials of the Chinese town and the white colonists fought against the riotous coolies.

As the Air-Dragon sailed over the spot no cessation of hostilities whatever occurred.

Of course her appearance must have attracted attention, but it did not check the fight, which waged hotter than ever.

Frank hardly knew which was the best manner to attack the Chinese.

He finally decided to if possible repulse

them with electric bombs, and then descend into the town and confer with its defenders.

He imparted this plan to Lee and Tattle and Dr. Vaneyke.

"I should think it would be the best thing to do, Mr. Reade," said the colonist. "I will leave it all to your very excellent judgment."

"Your plan is all right, Frank," declared Tattle, confidently.

"Of course it is," said Dr. Vaneyke. "One of the first and most important things is to repulse the attacking force."

"I only shrink from it because it will necessitate the taking of human life," said Frank.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Lee, earnestly. "You are preventing what will be a massacre. As for slaughtering a few of those miserable, degraded coolies, it would be a merciful thing."

Frank hesitated no longer.

He gave directions to Barney and Pomp to hold the Air Dragon down nearer the earth, so that he could bring the electric guns to bear upon the yellow foe.

The battle of the gates was waxing hotter every moment.

It was apparent that the assailants had learned the character of the air-ship, for its appearance did not deter them in the contest.

It was almost certain that they would very soon have succeeded in carrying the stockade had it not been for timely intervention.

Frank sighted one of the electric guns and sent a projectile into the midst of the savage horde. It exploded with terrific force.

The effect was most terrible. Heaps of dead and wounded men marked its destructive path.

This for a moment deterred the attacking party. The defenders, realizing that the air ship was aiding them, rallied and came up to the front boldly.

A few of the shells caused a panic among the rioters. They fell back, broke ranks, and then fled.

The defenders of the town made a sortie which was quite effective; then the Air Dragon descended into Yashu.

Lee, the colonist, was in a state of the wildest triumph. He fairly danced on the deck of the Air Dragon as he saw that the foe were driven away.

"But they will return," he said; "when they have recovered they will come back."

"Let them come," said Frank, confidently. "We will give them a worse reception next time."

"You have done a great thing for Yashu, Mr. Reade!" cried Lee; "but for you, it and many of our countrymen would have been wiped out of existence."

Down into the little town the air-ship descended. The streets were narrow, but there was a little public square which afforded a good landing place.

A great throng below greeted the descent of the air-ship with loud shouts and earnest acclamation. They recognized in it a deliverer.

The air-ship was instantly surrounded by men, women and children, both European and Chinese.

Alfred Lee was one of the first to leap to the ground. He was instantly shaking hands with the liberated missionaries.

One of these, who seemed to be the leading spirit of the colony, Lee brought forward and presented to Frank.

"This is Mr. Lorenzo Lane," he said, in introduction, "he is the mainstay of this colony, I assure you."

"That is giving me too much credit, Mr. Reade," said Lane, with a smile, "but I am glad to hail you as our deliverer."

"Indeed! I am glad to have been able to serve you," replied Frank. "I hope to preserve you from another such an attack. These rioters are a bad lot."

"Dangerous fellows I assure you. We have had some unpleasant experiences with them. But we hope now that they will become amenable to the law."

"This then is a treaty port?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Why, then, is not the government of China obliged to furnish you protection?"

"It is, and they are doing the best they can. But affairs in the Flowery Kingdom

are in a very precarious condition just now. The Emperor is a pusillanimous sort of ruler and has over-confidence in his abilities. The war has demoralized everything. Ignorant prejudice has gained the ascendancy, insurrection and disloyalty is rampant and really I tremble for the future of China."

"The Japs seem to be carrying everything before them!"

"Indeed they are. It is almost certain that they will yet capture Peking. In that event the present dynasty will be overthrown!"

"Which will not be a bad thing, will it?"

"Indeed, I believe not. Though I hardly see how the Chinese will find a capable ruler!"

"What is the matter with old Li Hung Chang?"

"He is an able man, but too old. That is not all. The military and naval arm of China is paralyzed."

"Well," said Frank, philosophically, "let them fight. It is nothing to you or I. We need only look after the interests of the subjects of our own country."

"Exactly! Just at present we are all in much peril. The mandarins of Yashu seem utterly unable to cope with the rebellious element."

"The U. S. Government should have sent a war-ship here long ago."

"No doubt they would have, had it not been for the fact that there are but a few in these waters, and they are already required at other points. But we are all right now that we have your co-operation."

"I hope so, replied Frank. "I don't believe these rascals can get the best of the air-ship."

Mr. Lane laughed.

"You can whip a big navy!" he declared. "You have a wonderful invention there."

Vandyke Tattle had been extremely busy with his notebook. Dr. Vaneyke had also been interviewing some of the colonists.

Barney and Pomp had been having a romp with some of the friendly Celestials and were right in their element.

"Begorra, China is the place for purty gurls!" cried Barney, winking his eye at one of the almond eyed damsels. "Shure I think I'd loike to sojourn here meself a while."

"Golly, I done fink dey wud hab yo' up fo' an idol in no time, T'i-h!" cried Pomp. "Yo' looks jes' like one ob dem, suah's yo' wuz born."

"Don't yez give me any av yure personal remarks, yez African ape!" retorted Barney. "Shure there's no disgrace in that. Phwat was George Washington but an idol of his people?"

Pomp wilted at this, and hurried off to the galley, to devise a new programme for dinner. But just at this moment the beating of a Chinese war-drum was heard.

Down through the dividing crowd came a tall, haughty mandarin, with a score of Chinese soldiers at his back. He advanced straight to the air-ship, and placed a hand upon it.

CHAPTER VIII.

A COWARDLY ABDUCTION.

THE action of the mandarin and his guard was so authoritative, that all eyes were fixed upon him.

He drew his keen sword and whirled it once above his head, at the same time shouting in Chinese:

"I am Hi Ping Yan, mandarin of the first class, and loyal subject of the Great Sun. I come to seize this ship of war in the name of the Most High, our good and holy emperor."

Lee and Lane, who were familiar with the Chinese language, interpreted the declaration to Frank.

It was a startling moment.

But the young inventor was as cool as an icicle.

"Humph," he muttered, "the whole army of China will not take the Air Dragon from me!"

"Great master who flies in the air!" cried the mandarin, pompously, "you are now, on penalty of your life, sworn to fight for the emperor against the pestilential Japanese, who have come to rack and

ravage our beautiful land. If you obey, you shall be made a great prince. If you refuse, you shall die!"

This was interpreted to Frank, who smiled grimly and said to Lane:

"Tell him this: I am a subject of the President of the United States, a country which can devour China at one gulp. I owe allegiance to no king or emperor or prince. I refuse to fight in the service of China, as I have already refused to fight in the service of Japan!"

This was interpreted to Hi Ping Yan, who listened intently and then replied forcibly and angrily:

"It is a great honor to fight for the Ruler of the Great Sun! The American must help our emperor to beat the invaders. He must do it or he shall die!"

"What is to be done?" asked Frank in a dilemma. "I can't seem to reason with this wooden-head. Shall I have to fight him?"

Lee and Lane were both in despair. They tried to reason with the mandarin. But he was obdurate.

"Temporize with him!" said Lane finally. "tell him you want three days to consider his offer!"

This was done. The mandarin upon this appeared satisfied. He became more affable, and finally went away highly pleased.

Frank did not like the situation.

"It looks to me as if I had got into something like a scrape," he declared. "How shall I get out of it without much trouble?"

"We will see to that," said Lane, with a resolute air. "Hi Ping Yan will learn that American subjects owe no allegiance to his Emperor."

The excitement over this affair had hardly died out, when another incident of a thrilling sort occurred.

Suddenly through the crowd a woman, distraught and agonized, came into view. She was wringing her hands and weeping violently.

Everybody gave way before her, but Lane suddenly gasped:

"My God, that is my wife!"

In a moment the leading missionary was by his wife's side.

"What is the matter, Helen?" he cried, with a terrible fear assailing him; "where is Myrtle?"

"Oh, Heaven help us!" cried the agonized wife. "She is gone!"

"Gone!" gasped Lane.

"Yes, she is lost to us forever, I fear."

Then the whole fearful story came out. The missionary and his sorrowing wife told it to Frank.

It seemed that among the river people, as those Chinese were called who dwelt in boats on the river, there was a young Celestial named Hop Sing.

Hop was more enterprising and scheming than any of his colleagues. He had spent some time at sea on board a junk, and it was even averred that he had been thick with the pirates which infested the Yellow Sea.

Hop Sing had one day visited Yashu, and seeing the missionary's daughter, Myrtle Lane, had fallen in love with her.

The daring young Celestial had been so bold as to try to make his passion known to her in the Chinese fashion.

Of course his advances were rejected and it was believed that the matter was ended.

But one night a band of ruffians attacked the Lane house and an effort was made to carry Myrtle away. Hop Sing was at the head of the villains.

They failed in their attempt, but from that moment Myrtle Lane was in deadly peril.

Indeed, she hardly dared venture abroad without a strong escort.

Under cover of the attack on the town, Hop Sing had stole up the river in a sampan, and anchored under the wing of the Lane house, which projected out over the water.

Then watching his opportunity while the excitement of the coming of the air-ship had drawn all the men to the other end of the town, he made an effort to capture his prize again.

This time he was successful.

Hop Sing and his fellows had gained an entrance to Myrtle's chamber, and overpowering her with a drug, had carried her

bodily to the sampan and vanished down the river.

Mrs. Lane had discovered the dastardly deed just too late to prevent it.

This was the terrible tale. As it spread through the crowd the most intense of excitement was aroused.

Myrtle Lane was a prime favorite in the colony. In an instant half a thousand men were ready to go to her rescue.

Sampans and house-boats were manned and sent down the river in pursuit.

But the effort might as well have been spared. They were unsuccessful to a certainty.

It was then learned that Hop Sing had gone to Boca del Taro, an island near the mouth of the river, where the pirates had a rendezvous.

This was believed to be an impregnable spot, and even the Chinese navy had been worsted in an attempt to oust this gang of pirates.

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed the missionary, in an agonized state of mind. "What shall I do! Oh, how shall I rescue my darling child?"

Frank had remained passive throughout. He listened to the entire tale and noted all proceedings.

Tattle and Dr. Vaneyke were much interested, and their sympathies were strongly aroused.

They went to Frank and said;

"Don't you think something ought to be done?"

"Yes," replied the young inventor, "it is a sad case. But if we leave Yashu, the coolies will attack the place again."

"Yet I think we ought to risk it," urged Tattle. "Why not, Frank?"

Thus adjured Frank decided to act. He at once called Lee to him.

"Tell your friend, Lane," he said, "that I am going to the rescue of his daughter with my air-ship."

"God bless you!" cried the colonist, earnestly. "You will do a Christian act, Mr. Reade. Your reward will be certain."

Frank at once made preparations to leave Yashu.

The anchors were pulled in and the dynamos again put to work. Barney was in the pilot house awaiting orders.

At this critical juncture a distant dull boom was heard.

Tattle clutched Frank's arm.

"Look!" he cried.

Both gazed into the distance down into the river. A shell had risen high in the air and had burst with deafening roar. What did it mean?

CHAPTER IX.

THE NAVAL FIGHT.

SUCH a shell could only come from a heavy gun. There was no fort or battery along the shore with such a piece of ordnance.

That the voyagers were astonished goes without saying.

"What is the meaning of that?" cried Dr. Vaneyke in amazement. "Ah, there goes another."

Then followed at regular and rapid intervals the boom of heavy guns. All the residents of the town were now interested.

They thronged the housetops and the wall of the town.

But they could not get a very good view of the lower river, and it was impossible to tell what was going on there.

Frank and his friends were determined to ascertain.

"Let the ship go up, Barney!" cried Frank.

"All roight, sor!"

Up shot the Air-Dragon. She hung a thousand feet in the air for a few moments over Yashu.

The view of the voyagers was a wide one.

They saw at once what was the trouble in the lower river. It gave all a thrill of surprise.

"A sea fight!" cried Tattle, pulling out his note-book. "There is a subject of interest."

"That is what it is!" cried Dr. Vaneyke. "China and Japan!"

Two wooden cruisers were sailing obliquely about the harbor, each striving to get a point of vantage over the other.

One flew the flag of Japan, the other the royal ensign of China.

As the two deadly foes were beating about for the advantage, they kept up a stunning fire.

Hot shot and shells were hurled back and forth with the greatest rapidity.

The Japanese cruiser was indeed plucky, for it had risked its safety in venturing into the harbor.

For, just beyond the outer headland, two more Chinese vessels were coming post-haste to block the entrance and entrap the foe.

This was all very well planned, but the Jap did not flinch. They were determined to whip their antagonist and escape also.

Of course they sought the battle.

The wily Chinese on the other hand acted wholly upon the defensive. They were waiting to make sure of the trap.

Frank let the air-ship hang in mid-air, and the voyagers intently watched the conflict.

They were well repaid.

The Japanese proved themselves the most able of seamen. Their maneuvering won the applause of the aerial spectators.

"By Jove, the Japs are plucky, aren't they?" cried Tattle. "Hello! there goes a yard for John Chinaman!"

The Japanese vessel had got the range, and the Chinese lost one of their yards at that moment.

Then the battle became hotter.

Aided by a strong current the Jap vessel began to close upon the Chinaman. The cannonade was furious.

It did not seem as if either vessel could live long under the pounding of so much solid iron.

The Chinese vessel seemed to suffer the worst. The Japanese gunners were better marksmen.

Its cabin had been reduced to kindling wood, its thwarts were shot away, guns were dismounted, and now a mast went crashing by the board.

"The Japanese win!" cried Tattle; "the Chinaman is sinking!"

One terrible broadside the Japanese cruiser poured into its defeated foe. Then it drew away and left its late opponent to sink.

The naval battle was not over though by any means. Other factors in the contest now appeared.

Suddenly into the opening which led into the little harbor the reinforcing Chinese vessels hove into view.

They were larger in build and carried more guns than the Jap. Almost instantly they opened fire upon the victor of the duel.

Two to one! The odds were most tremendous. But the plucky Japanese cruiser did not seem disposed to evade the issue.

Instead she made some most astonishing maneuvers to get the advantage of her two foes.

"Upon my word," cried Tattle, with eager interest, "she will elude them yet! The Chinese are not in it with the Japs."

Round and round the harbor went the three vessels. The Japanese cruiser was fighting batteries both port and starboard.

And not without effect either. It was seen that she was getting a terrible pounding though.

Her yards were well shot away. Her funnel and bowsprit were gone, and there were gaping holes in her bulwarks.

But yet she kept afloat, and suddenly the aerial voyagers gave a great cry:

"Look! There goes another Chinese ship."

It was true. A timely volley from the Japs' batteries sank one of her foes. The cheer which went up from the crew could be heard on the air-ship's deck.

It began to look as if the Japs would win in spite of the tremendous odds.

But, alas, the plucky little vessel was now seen to be badly crippled. She seemed to lose command of herself, and swinging round, struck a rock.

This was the moment for her foe. The Chinaman bore down upon her exultantly, and fired a raking volley into her.

This terminated the fight.

The Japanese cruiser went down with

all on board. Only one man was seen to swim for the shore.

And a boat put out from the Chinese cruiser to catch him. At once Frank started up.

"Lower the ship, Barney!" he cried. "I am going to save that plucky fellow."

The order was obeyed. The air-ship swept down close to the struggling Jap. A rope was thrown him and he was quickly dangling in the air.

A volley of shot from the Chinese cruiser came whistling about the air-ship, but luckily did no damage.

Frank sent the air-ship up out of range. Then the swimming Jap was drawn aboard.

As his dripping form came over the rail, Frank gave a cry of recognition. The rescued man also shouted:

"Welcome, Mr. Reade! We meet again as I told you we would!"

It was no other than the Japanese Envoy, Mut Su Mishima, who had tried to enlist Frank in the service of the Emperor of Japan.

The greeting was a warm one and the Japanese envoy was profuse in his manifestations of gratitude.

"If those dogs had overtaken me they would have cut me in pieces!" he cried. "But what say you, Mr. Reade? Did we not give them a good fight?"

"Indeed you did!" cried Frank. "I admired your seamanship."

Then followed an exchange of experiences. Mut Su listened with interest to the story of the fight at Yashu.

"Come to Japan!" he said. "We welcome Americans there."

But when told of the abduction of Myrtle Lane he was horrified.

"By my soul," he cried, "she must be found at once! Hop Sing is a bad Chinaman, and he is the right hand man of Lo Wun, the worst pirate of the whole China seaboard. I will help you to find his stronghold, and both the countries of China and Japan will unite in giving you thanks if you will exterminate him and his crew!"

"I will surely do that!" declared Frank.

CHAPTER X.

THE MISCHIEVOUS SHELL.

THE declaration of Mut Su Mishima that he would aid the voyagers to find the rendezvous of the pirate Lo Wun was thankfully received.

That Hop Sing had taken his fair prize thither, there was little doubt.

"I will do all this for you!" declared Mut Su, "upon the condition that you will thereafter land me safely in Japan. You are welcome at our emperor's court."

"I will gladly do that," replied Frank. And so the bargain was made.

There was little use of remaining where they were any longer. The Chinese cruiser was trying to make a target of them.

"I would like to give her a shot," said Frank, "if only for her impudence. But international complications forbid."

Under Mut Su's direction the air-ship started along the coast.

The envoy did not believe that Hop Sing was at Boca del Taro. There was another rendezvous called Nana Pashi, a hundred miles up the coast.

There was no doubt that Hop Sing had gone thither in one of Lo Wun's fast sailing vessels. But, of course, he had not reached that point yet in the brief while which had elapsed.

But he was doubtless on his way and this in itself was a favorable turn for our voyagers, for it would enable them to intercept him.

That is, this they hoped to do. The Air Dragon at once started upon its voyage of pursuit.

Keeping along over the sea not far from the land the pursuers noted every sailing craft which was visible on the water below them.

But all were of the coasting type of fishermen and not one showed the appearance of being one of Lo Wun's piratical vessels.

The failure to come up with any craft which might be suspected as the one on board of which was Hop Sing and his prize somewhat disconcerted Mut Su, the envoy.

"That is very strange!" he exclaimed. "He cannot have sailed so fast! We ought to be up with him!"

"Perhaps we are," suggested Frank.

"How?"

"Some one of these humble and harmless appearing vessels may be the very one we want. Why should not the rascal try to disguise himself in just such a manner?"

Mut Su nodded vigorously.

"Good for you, Mr. Reade," he exclaimed. "No doubt you have hit upon the truth. Now the question arises how are we to distinguish the vessel?"

"That is difficult."

"We cannot hail and search every one we meet. That would be impossible."

"Most certainly."

"Then what shall we do?" asked the envoy in despair. "You are an inventor, Mr. Reade. Show us how to invent a plan for the solution of this mystery."

"I think I can tell you the best plan," said Frank.

"Ah! What is it?"

"Why not go straight to Lo Wun's rendezvous and lay in wait for Hop Sing's vessel to come along. If Nana Pashi is the spot why not go thither at once?"

Mut Su clapped his hands.

"Good!" he cried, enthusiastically. "Why did I not think of that? Go to Nana Pashi! Of course. We will be sure to nab our man when he comes. Steer into the northeast! That will take us there!"

The air ship was flying along at an even rate. The excitement was seemingly over for the time.

While Frank and the envoy were holding their discussion, Tattle and Dr. Vaneyke were engaged in a hot game of chess upon the after deck.

Barney and Pomp were holding a jolly confab in the pilot-house.

But that the incidents of the day were not over by any means, was suddenly demonstrated.

The air ship was maintaining an even speed, some distance from the shore, when Frank heard the distant boom of cannon.

"Eh, what's that?" he exclaimed, springing up. "I thought we had got beyond the naval fight. Can it be that this is another?"

"It can't be possible!" exclaimed Mut Su. Both rushed to the rail.

They saw beneath them a small island, which until this moment had escaped notice. There were many such along the coast, and they were generally occupied by small settlements of Chinese, who lived by fishing and the cultivation of small gardens.

But this isle seemed to be fortified and garrisoned by Chinese troops.

It was a small outpost and coaling station for the Chinese navy. The garrison commander had espied the air-ship, and conceiving it was some devilish contrivance of the dogs of Japanese for their destruction, had caused a shell to be sent up after it.

Gaining the rail, it required only a moment for Frank and Mut Su to take in the situation.

"The fools!" cried Frank, angrily. "Don't they know better than to fire at us?"

"That is easily explained," said Mut Su. "They think we are a Japanese foe."

"But they should first learn the truth," cried Frank. "I've half a mind to return their fire."

"Do by all means!" cried Mut Su, delightedly.

But Frank refrained from doing this. He simply brought the air-ship about and displayed the American flag. This was his mistake.

He was dealing with an ignorant foe which hardly knew the American flag from a piece of cheese-cloth. They accepted it as a challenge.

Boom—boom!

Up came the shells and one narrowly missed the Air-Dragon's rail. A wild cry of alarm escaped Frank's lips and all dodged into the cabin.

The shell burst not one hundred feet above the deck. The fearful result can be imagined.

None of the voyagers, fortunately, were injured, but a piece of the shell lodged in

the joint of the rotoscope shaft and instantly stopped its revolution.

The Air-Dragon began to sink. The wings, of course, made the descent easy, but their motion was not alone sufficient to keep the ship afloat.

Frank rushed again to the rail.

"You fools!" he yelled, angrily, as he waved the American flag, "don't you see what you have done? The Government of China shall pay for this."

Evidently it dawned upon the island garrison just then that they might have made a mistake, for they ceased firing.

Frank calculated the distance to the mainland. It was too far away for the air-ship to hope to reach it.

To drop in the water was suicidal; there was no alternative but to make the descent upon the island.

So the propeller was started, and the boat held steady over the island. Down she sank gracefully.

Mut Su now betrayed alarm.

"If they see me," he cried, "they will certainly kill me! I think I had better keep out of sight."

"Hide in the cabin!" cried Frank. "As soon as I can get that obstruction out of the rotoscope shaft we will go along. I will read them a royal lesson on international etiquette."

Mut Su therefore secreted himself in the cabin.

Down sank the air-ship and finally landed upon a high bluff before the Chinese fort. A scene of excitement followed.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LOGIC OF A CHINAMAN.

OUT of the island fort rushed the Chinese soldiers. They were evidently eager to make sure of their conquest.

Frank did not wait for their coming. He sent Barney and Pomp aloft instantly with the necessary tools to repair the damaged shaft.

The next moment the air ship was surrounded by the yellow horde, but Frank was at the rail, and exhorted them in an angry way.

A tall, richly-dressed officer advanced, and tried to talk with Frank. He was evidently the commander.

But the young inventor could not make himself understood. It was evident that an interpreter must be found.

Fortunately there was one in the Chinese band. He came forward, and an understanding was quickly reached.

"You, who fly in the air," said the Chinese commander, with dignity, "are our foe. You are in the employ of Japan!"

"That is false!" cried Frank, hotly. "I am an American citizen, and your government shall pay well for this outrage!"

"Don't you know that this country is at war with Japan?"

"Yes," replied Frank, "but is that any reason why you should fire upon me?"

"Can you prove that you are not in the employ of Japan?" asked the Chinese commander.

"I can! I carry nothing—" Frank instantly stopped as he thought of Mut Su and his peril. He quickly continued: "My word is my guarantee!"

The Chinese commander smiled grimly. He had noticed the equivocation slight as it was.

He turned and signaled to a number of his soldiers. They came forward with loaded muskets.

"What are you going to do?" asked Frank, sharply.

"I am going to search your air-ship," replied the commander of the island fort. "You are strongly under suspicion!"

Frank was not only alarmed, but very angry.

"I object to that outrage!" he declared. "the first man who comes aboard my ship dies like a dog!"

Barney and Pomp descended from above and Dr. Vaneyke and Tattle, armed with repeaters, came out of the cabin. The Chinese commander was for a moment only disconcerted.

He knew that there was a disparity of numbers. This gave him confidence. But he waved his hand toward the fort.

"It is folly for you to resist," he said, sternly. "You are covered by cannon and

at a word I could have you blown to fragments. We must search your ship. If we find nothing Japanese aboard we will apologize and let you go free. But if you are proved agents of Japan, then you are our prisoners and we must seize your air-ship."

In vain Frank tried to bluff, argue and even entreat the obdurate officer. In despair the young inventor turned to Tattle.

"What shall we do? They will cut Mut Su to pieces on sight!"

"It is horrible!" exclaimed the reporter.

"What can we do?"

"Run in quick and tell him to flee for his life!" whispered Frank. "Anything but capture!"

Tattle darted into the cabin. Mut Su had been all the while in a position where he had heard all.

He was very calm as Tattle entreated him to fly.

"No!" he said, resolutely. "You have done all you can for me. It is the fortune of war. I am caged and I cannot evade the issue. I shall deliver myself up to clear you of all blame."

The Chinese soldiers were at the rail. But before they could come aboard, Mut Su stepped boldly out on deck and held up both his hands.

"I surrender, Sir Commander!" he cried in Chinese, "but in doing so I absolve these Americans from all connection with the cause of my country. They are innocent of any collusion with me or my nation. They simply rescued me from drowning in the waves of the sea, just as they would have rescued you or one of your people, simply for humanity's sake, that was all. I am your prisoner and claim the treatment due a prisoner of war, and an Envoy of Japan!"

The Chinese commander had listened to this brave and honorable declaration without a change of countenance.

But now an evil light of triumph and the malignant hatred of his people for the Japanese shone in his almond eyes. He waved his hands to his soldiers.

Instantly they sprang aboard the air-ship and laid hands on Mut Su. The envoy made no resistance.

"Lead the Japanese dog down here before me!" commanded the Chinese commander.

His order was obeyed. Mut Su stood before his captor and his foe.

"My soul, I cannot see so brave a man slaughtered!" exclaimed Frank, in an aside to his companions. "They will not spare his life. There is too much barbarian hatred in that old commander's eyes."

"Can we not rescue him?" whispered Tattle.

"I wish there was a way."

"Begorra, Misther Frank," whispered Barney, "one more blow of the hammer an' ther rotoscope shaft will be all right."

"Do you mean that?" asked Frank, eagerly.

"Shure, sor."

"Well, climb up there just as quick as you can and strike it. Pomp, go into the cabin quick and bring me a wire connected with the dynamos that I can fasten to this rail. They may try to come aboard of us again, and the next time we must give them a hot reception."

The two servitors needed no second bidding.

Away they dashed. Meanwhile Dr. Vaneyke and Tattle were watching the proceedings of the Chinese.

Mut Su, cool and brave, stood before his captor, who regarded him with a light of positive hatred in his eyes.

"So, you dog of a Japanese, you thought to outwit Wun Foo, did you?" exclaimed the commander in scathing tones, "for this you need not ask for mercy. The emperor has forbidden that. The insults heaped upon our people, can only find atonement in blood!"

"I ask no mercy of you nor of your caittiff of an emperor!" retorted Mut Su, hotly, "but there are rules which govern all warfare between civilized and honorable nations. Were you captured by one of our military officers, you would not thus be subjected to indignity, but remanded as a prisoner of war, to await exchange or a suitable ransom."

Wun Foo laughed sardonically.

"Very clever, but you cannot evade your fate in such a way. The plea is futile. Think you that China makes war for pleasure! When the Imperial Dragon calls us to war, he makes it our sacred duty to not spare the foe until he has spilled his last drop of blood!"

"Barbarian!" ejaculated Mut Su. "China is yet benighted and it needs only the round thrashing Japan will give her to bring her out from this cloud of bigotry and ignorance. For this end I, with thousands of my countrymen, must sacrifice life."

"Your words are an insult to our emperor," hissed Wun Foo. "I were recreant to my trust if I did not resent them. Coward! Dog!"

Wun Foo's right hand dealt Mut Su a terrible blow across the face. At the same moment the Chinese commander spat upon the Japanese.

"Jericho!" gasped Tattle, "if I was Mut Su, if I died the next moment for it, I'd get one hack at that bigoted and barbarous old Turk!"

CHAPTER XII.

SHARP DEFENSIVE WORK.

BUT Mut Su's equanimity was something marvelous to behold. The blood coursed down his face from the cowardly blow given him.

He even forced a derisive smile, and replied with cutting force:

"This is proof of my assertion that China is given over to barbarians like you, sir!"

Wun Foo in spite of himself was ashamed. He saw that he had muchly soiled his dignity in that cowardly descent upon a man so much at his mercy.

But he was a dogged old scoundrel, and determined to carry his point even though he was adjudged wrong.

He gave a few sharp orders to his followers.

Instantly two of them advanced and forced Mut Su to his knees. For the first time the Japanese showed apprehension.

But it was only a little gasp of horror. He knew well what was coming.

The two powerful soldiers flashed in air their powerful two handed swords. They were experts at decapitation.

One of the swordsmen could have cleft the envoy's head from his shoulders at one blow. But it was customary for two to strike from opposite directions.

Once the two headsmen brandished their shining blades aloft. A moment more and Mut Su's head would have rolled in the dust.

But even as the headsmen waited their command, there was a convulsive movement upon the part of each, they dropped their heavy swords and fell in a heap.

For a moment a pin could have been heard to drop, so great was the silence.

Swift as a messenger of thought, death had come upon the would-be murderers.

There had been no report of fire-arms, not a sound. But upon the temple of each was a tiny pink spot.

Could its course have been followed into the brain, there a small steel needle would have been found with a weighted end to give it proper balance. Where these deadly missiles had come from can be guessed by the reader.

From the deck of the air-ship they had come. Barney and Pomp had fired them from the cabin, unseen and unheard.

They used a small and wonderfully constructed air gun, the invention of Frank Reade, Jr., which was noiseless and threw a needle, which, at short range with accurate aim, was deadly.

Just in time they had cut off the deadly work of the Chinese headsmen.

"Golly!" gasped Pomp, "dat was jes' wha' de doctah ordered. I don' see but what we fixed dem chaps dead to rights."

"Yez are right, naygur!" cried Barney, in a hoarse whisper. "Bejabers I'd loike to give one to the big heathen himself!"

"Not yet!" said Frank from the deck, for he had overheard this remark. "Wait for orders!"

Barney and Pomp repaired the rotoscope shaft all right and the air-ship was able to spring into the air at any moment.

This could have been done and escape

made sure for the voyagers, but Frank would not once think of leaving Mut Su behind.

He was determined to rescue the envoy if it was in his power. He realized that Wun Foo was wrong in not holding Mut Su a prisoner of war, for the envoy's rank entitled him to this consideration.

For a moment Wun Foo and his followers were startled and mystified at the fate of the two headsmen. Then every eye was turned upon the air-ship.

But there on the deck stood the voyagers apparently as mystified as the Chinese. Wun Foo's face changed in expression.

He advanced and looked at the pink spots on the temples of the dead men. They were not bullet wounds. There was no flow of blood.

It was apparent that all the Chinese were much awed. Tattle was an accomplished ventriloquist. His quick wit contributed to the success of the affair.

He had picked up just enough Chinese to be able to say vaguely:

"Don't dare kill him. The Dragon forbids!"

These sepulchral words sounded in the air just over Wun Foo's head. The Chinese commandant gave a yell of terror and leaped back.

But again the voice sounded at his elbow weirdly:

"Don't kill him!"

The commandant yelled, and turning, gripped a coolie by the windpipe.

"How dare you trifle with me!" he yelled. "I will tear your vitals out!"

But the voice again sounded in the air above him:

"Don't kill him!"

This was enough for Wun Foo. The astounded Chinaman could not believe but that the voice really came from a spiritual source. He staggered forward, crying:

"The Great Dragon commands! Set him free! He shall live!"

Frank exchanged glances with Tattle.

"You did that?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Very clever. I didn't know you were a ventriloquist!"

"Oh, you don't know all my virtues," laughed the reporter. "A man in newspaperdom must have a few qualities besides his good looks, you know."

"You have saved the poor devil's life. How would it do to command the rascal to give him his liberty?"

"I am afraid we shall overdo it there," said Tattle, shrewdly. "Wait a bit."

"You are right."

But now Wun Foo, evidently disappointed at the refusal of his deity to allow him to take Mut Su's life, turned the savage force of his antipathy upon the air-ship.

"Seize the flying ship!" he cried. "It shall be the property of the emperor!"

But Frank picked up the American flag and cried, angrily:

"Dare not lay a hand upon this air ship or you and your emperor will rue the day! We are under the protection of this flag!"

"You are in league with Japan as the finding of this envoy in your company proves!" cried the commandant. "Your air-ship is confiscated in the name of the emperor!"

Frank saw that there was no use of trying to reason with Wun Foo. The crisis had come.

He retreated to the cabin.

"Turn on the current, Barney!" he cried. "Charge the rail!"

The wires had been connected with the steel rail of the air-ship. Barney obeyed orders.

The rail was charged with enough electricity to knock the side out of a building. The Chinese soldiers, with yells of rage, dashed forward.

They reached the rail of the air-ship.

Here they met with what proved a most stunning obstacle.

It was a reception such as they had never dreamed of. The first one who touched the rail was hurled some yards away in an insensible heap.

Then others followed him. Just a touch was enough to pile them in heaps.

Wun Foo saw the astounding development, and was stupefied. He saw that

his men were unable to get aboard the air-ship.

"It is some devil's trick!" he cried. "We will try the guns of the fort upon the flying ship. Come back, all of ye!"

The Chinese soldiers retreated with this command. There had been no more critical moment than the present.

CHAPTER XIII.

BESCUÉ OF THE ENVOY.

WUN Foo's intention doubtless was to turn the guns of the fort upon the air-ship.

This of course would be most disastrous. One shot might reduce the frail vessel to atoms.

The failure of the Chinese to board the Air-Dragon on account of the heavily charged hand-rail by no means decided matters in the favor of our voyagers.

The odds were now largely against them. Of course Frank could have sent the air-ship up and distanced the fire of the Chinese fort.

But he was loth to leave Mut Su yet a prisoner. He was determined to if possible rescue him.

"We are going to have trouble, Frank!" said Dr. Vaneyke.

"What will we do?" exclaimed Tattle.

"Hold your horses!" said the young inventor, coolly. "I'll find a way out of the scrape."

Frank had been much averse to firing into the Chinese fort; but he saw now that self protection demanded it.

So he rushed to the dynamo gun, and instantly brought it to bear upon the wall on which the Chinese cannons were mounted.

He knew that there was not an instant to lose. The first shot determined the contest for either party.

Only two of the Chinese cannon could be brought to bear upon the air-ship. To dismount these was Frank's purpose.

Quick as a flash he placed a dynamite projectile in the breech; then one moment for a clear sight.

Wun Foo and his followers had scattered to allow their compatriots in the fort to fire.

Mut Su, in charge of guards, was some fifty yards to the left. It was a critical moment.

Then, before the guns in the fort could speak, the electric gun did its work.

There was a shock, a hissing recoil, and a tremendous roar filled the air.

A terrible breach yawned in the wall of the Chinese fort. Where the guns had been there was only a heap of debris.

The effect can hardly be described in words. The Chinese were dumbfounded. This display of power was something most unexpected.

For some moments Wun Foo was unable to act. He was completely taken aback by the demonstration.

But the aerial voyagers were quick to follow up their momentary advantage.

Barney and Pomp began picking off the guards who had Mut Su in charge. Seeing this Wun Foo shouted orders for others of his men to reinforce them.

But they never executed the order.

The reason for this was a good one. Frank now once more took a hand in the game.

He drew a quick line with the electric gun and sent a projectile to check the reinforcements. It struck the ground in front of the Chinese soldiers.

Exploding with terrible force a literal mound of earth was raised in their very front. Many of them were half buried by it.

In consternation the Chinese broke and fled. Even those in charge of Mut Su panic stricken threw down their arms in token of surrender.

In vain Wun Foo tried to bring his terrified men back. They would not be persuaded.

With cheers Barney and Pomp now sprang from the air-ship's deck to complete the rescue of Mut Su. In a moment they were by the envoy's side.

His captors were flat upon their faces with superstitious terror.

The Japanese envoy lost no time in at once starting back for the Air-Dragon

with Barney and Pomp. Some of Wun Foo's soldiers rallied by him tried to pick off the fleeing trio with their muskets but were unable to do so.

Clambering over the rail they were safely on deck once more. It was a happy moment.

Wun Foo, frantic and reckless, was visible below shaking his fists at the air-ship. It would have been easy to have picked him off with a rifle bullet, but no one cared to do this.

So he was left alone in his impotent fury while the Air Dragon sprang high into the air and sailed away once more upon her course to Yashu.

This had terminated the incident, but Mut Su never forgot his narrow escape. He was very grateful.

"When you visit Japan," he said, "you will see that our emperor will know how to repay you."

"What a glorious story this will make for the newspapers when I shall get back home!" said Tattle, rapturously, as he diligently made notes.

"I certainly hope that no international trouble will come from this episode," said Dr. Vaneyke.

"I don't see how there can!" declared Frank, "for we did not start the trouble in any way. They fired upon us despite the fact that we displayed the American flag."

"Have no fears," said Mut Su, confidently; "this Commandant Wun Foo has too much sense to let this affair reach the ears of Li Hung Chang or the emperor. China is not desirous of getting into any dispute with your country, and the result no doubt would be that the presumptuous commandant would lose his official, if not his own head."

"I believe that is correct!" cried Tattle. "Certainly we were assaulted by the Chinese!"

This set all fears at rest, and the air-ship kept on its way toward Nana Pashi.

The delay it was concluded had given Hop Sing a chance to get further on his way to Nana Pashi. But for all that he might be easily overtaken.

Until darkness fell the Air Dragon kept on her way. Then the search-light sent its rays flashing along the coast.

The peril of this sort of navigation speedily became manifest.

Along the shore there were encountered various fortifications, and these invariably hurled shells into the air.

It was necessary to keep at a great altitude to avoid these, and this made the navigation very difficult.

Moreover Mut Su could not very well remain up all night to direct the course of the Air Dragon, neither could he be sure of the air-ship's course. So Frank decided upon a change of tactics.

He decided to find a lonely spot upon the shore and there descend and wait for daylight.

This plan was welcomed by all and the search-light soon located an unfrequented spot and made its descent.

The search-light was shut off so that attention might not be attracted to the spot. Then all but Barney and Pomp prepared to tire.

Barney and Pomp were to remain on guard during the night each serving alternately. Frank and Dr. Vaneyke at once turned in, as did Mut Su.

But Tattle sat up in the cabin to make some notes until midnight.

Barney and Pomp were on the forward deck playing a festive game of poker. Thus matters were when an incident, the first of a train of exciting experiences occurred.

The two jokers were intent on their game and it must be admitted were for a time delinquent in their duty.

CHAPTER XIV.

BARNEY AND POMP FIND ENTERTAINMENT.

POMP had just captured a rich jack pot with four aces; phenomenal luck, and Barney was exceedingly sore.

"Begorra I'd loike to know how yez kin do that?" exclaimed the Celt, suspiciously. "I've played this game all me loife and niver held sich a hand as that mesilf!"

Pomp's eyes flashed.

"Look out dar, chile! I don't like any insinuations. Does you fink I done cheated ye?"

"Bjabers it's a subject for investigation!" declared Barney.

"Huh, luk out fo' yo' tongue! Dis chile carry a razor up his sleeve for sich fings as dat!"

It was likely that there would presently have been a ruction between the two jokers had it not been for an incident.

At this moment a voice came out of the gloom seemingly almost at Barney's elbow.

"Melican man playee cards! No playee likee Chinaman. Heap no good."

"Be me sowl!" gasped Barney.

"Golly!" ejaculated Pomp.

Both jokers were instantly on their feet and staring about.

"Phwat the devil was that?"

"I done heard somebody speak!"

"Begorra so did I!"

Then at the same moment both jokers caught sight of a figure at the rail. In the dim light his face could not very well be seen, but his dress was that of a Celestial.

At once they tumbled.

"It's a Chineel!" cried Barney. "An' he knows how to talk Amerikan. Whurroo, there, yez yellor customer, phwat do yez want here?"

"Me Melican man's friend. Pi Ho good Chineeman. Cookee, washee, allee same Melican man down in Slan Flancisco!"

Both Barney and Pomp laughed at this announcement. They realized at once that Pi Ho was a returned emigrant from the shores of Yankeeland.

"How many more of yez are there?" questioned Barney, suspiciously.

"Nobody wif Pi Ho. He allee lone. Walkee on beach. See Melican man's light. Come down an' slee him!"

"Well, if yez are alone an' yez are frindly, yez are wilcum to cum aboard," declared Barney; "but mind yez, no treachery, or be Mither Murphy's pigs it'll be the death av yez!"

"Me Melican man's fiend. No affaid of Pi Ho. He allee light."

With which Pi Ho came over the rail. In a few moments so sociable was he that the three were fast friends.

Pi Ho's story was a plausible one.

He had emigrated to America some years previous and worked in San Francisco until he had saved up sufficient money to go back to the Celestial Kingdom.

He had procured a wife and a profitable rice plantation, and had been happy as a Chinaman could be until the war with Japan.

The Emperor, however, had levied so heavily upon the rice growers for money with which to carry on the war, that Pi Ho had fallen almost to the verge of poverty.

"Dey takee my plantation next," he declared, "then they tly makee Pi Ho flightee. Melican man sayee so. I glo to Melica wif him an' workee allee samee workee arms off."

"Yez might see Mистер Frank about that," declared Barney, "but pwhere is yer rice plantashun, anywy?"

"Lilly bit ob ways ober hillee. Melican man comee over gib heap good stuff to dlink. Burnee throat, setttee stomick on fire, allee samee gettee in bar-room Slan Flancisco!"

It did not require any interpreter for Barney and Pomp to get at the gist of this statement. They looked at each other and grinned.

"Phwat do yez say, naygur?"

"Golly! I neber was known to refuse de invitashun ob such a nice gemmen as dis!" replied Pomp.

"Phwat wud Mистер Frank say, if we left der ship!" muttered Barney.

Then he chanced to gaze through the open cabin door and an idea struck him.

The reporter, Tattle, was sitting at the table writing industriously.

Barney strode to the door and respectfully bowing, said:

"Shure, Mr. Tattle, an' wud yez do me a favor?"

Tattle looked up in surprise.

"Certainly!" he replied, readily. "What may it be?"

"How long are yez going to sit up, sor?"

"Until I get my article written!"

"Well, sor, there's the naygur an' I as wants to go on a bit av a walk up the beach, sor. Wud yez moind watching the boat fer about an hour?"

"Certainly!" replied Tattle, with alacrity, "go right along. I'll look after everything!"

Barney returned joyfully to Pomp and Pi Ho. No time was lost in at once setting out for Pi Ho's residence.

Along the beach the hospitable Chinaman led the way. Suddenly upon crossing a part of the cliff they came upon the lights of a little settlement which Pi Ho explained was a town called Hosh Ku.

"My house ober dhere!" he said, pointing to a rather pretty little structure with a typical Chinese garden and verandas.

As the two voyagers accompanied their host through the town, they passed a large pavilion lighted with lanterns and where hosts of men and women were playing dice and cards.

"Playee fan tan," declared Pi Ho. "Allee samee Melican man in Slan Flancisco. Mebbe Melican man likee tly his luckee when come backee."

"Golly, dat would be jes' up to snuff!" declared Pomp.

But they pushed on to Pi Ho's house for the time. There they were received royally by Pi Ho's wife and three charming daughters.

Both Barney and Pomp drank such an abundance of the curious stuff that "burnee throatee, settee stomick on fire" that they actually waxed hilarious. Their animal spirits rapidly gained the ascendancy.

They began to sing songs and tell improbable yarns to the delectation of Pi Ho's household. At last they became so uproarious that very discreetly the Celestial host decided to take them on an excursion around the town.

But it required some little strategy to induce the two frisky "Melicans" to leave the glass "that cheers." However, Pi Ho's diplomacy finally succeeded and they were soon in the open air.

To say that Barney and Pomp were happy would be a mild statement.

Down the street they hilariously made their way with their genial host, who explained matters to the curious crowd that followed the foreigners.

Being under Pi Ho's protection, the two jokers were perfectly safe and were jokingly received by the merry inhabitants of Hosh Ku.

They stopped at a Fan Tan gaming house and blew in what coin they had in a few moments. It required but little time for the wily Chinese to clean them out.

This however did not sober them and they next wandered into a chop house. Here Pi Ho innocently feasted them upon rat-tail soup and a few other confections and delicacies which resulted in effectually capping the climax.

The inexperienced foreigners disgraced themselves and proved their inability to go upon a successful spree a la Chinese, by falling in a drunken stupor upon the floor of the chop house.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TORNADO.

HAD the community of Hosh Ku been like that of some civilized countries where law is supposed to abide, they might have fared sadly in their helplessness.

But the Hosh Kuites were simple and charitable people, and inclined to sympathize with rather than censure the unwary and luckless victims of Celestial disposition.

Nor did Pi Ho desert them.

The generous and hospitable host came to the front most gracefully.

Four coolies were subverted for a few coins of the realm to place the two helpless men upon a stretcher. Then with a procession of some magnitude in the rear they were carried homeward.

Tattle had waited indulgently for the return of the two servitors, and had begun to wax impatient as the early hours of the morning began to draw nigh.

"Mighty curious what has become of those chaps," he muttered. "I've half a mind to turn in."

And thus he was mentally jawing the

"graceless rascals" when an astonishing sight burst upon his gaze.

Through the darkness a procession with torches was seen coming along the beach. Then the startled Tattle saw two men lying on a stretcher.

He instantly accepted the apparent fact that Barney and Pomp had met with a serious accident. At once he rushed to the pilot house and pressed the alarm gong.

Instantly Frank, Dr. Vaneyke and Mut Su came rushing on deck. The envoy retreated when he saw the crowd of Chinese coming.

"Mercy on us!" cried Dr. Vaneyke.

"What has happened?"

"Where are Barney and Pomp?" demanded Frank.

Tattle explained matters. Not one guessed the truth of the actual condition of the two jokers.

Straight up to the air-ship came Pi Ho with his charge. As Frank and Dr. Vaneyke leaped down he cried:

"Bring Melican men home. No standee Chinee fun. Heap no good."

"What has happened them?" cried Frank, anxiously. And in that moment his fears were dispelled as Pi Ho replied:

"No hurtee! Only heap dunkee."

"Drunk!" exclaimed Frank, in astonishment. "Why, they never did such a thing before."

Then from Pi Ho an explanation of all was obtained. But at this moment both stupefied men came to their senses and staggered to their feet.

In spite of their condition they took in the situation. They saw Frank Reade Jr. standing before them accusingly and heard his sarcastic denunciation:

"Well, you are a pretty pair!"

Barney and Pomp, too full for utterance, literally crept away to their staterooms to sober themselves in the quickest possible way.

Pi Ho soon made himself agreeable with Frank. The young inventor was pleased to learn from him many valuable points.

Pi Ho explained that there were many communities, of which Hosh Ku was one, that disapproved of the war with Japan.

"Allee samee fightee with our brothers," he declared. "We no right killee them. They no right killee us."

"That is a common sense view of it, Pi Ho!" declared Frank, "if all of your people looked at it that way there would soon be no war."

Despite all this Frank sent word privately to Mut Su to keep out of sight in the cabin.

He was not anxious for any trouble that could easily be avoided.

Daylight came before the conference with Pi Ho was ended.

The Americanized Chinaman knew of Hop Sing and his piratical colleagues well.

They were often in the habit of devastating small settlements along the coast, and Hash Ku had long feared an attack.

Just as they stepped out on deck Pi Ho gave a glance at the sky.

The Celestials on the beach had suddenly started homeward with cries of wildest alarm.

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Frank, "what is the matter?"

Pi Ho's face showed terror.

"Me gottee get home quick!" he cried, "big tlornado come, sweepie ev'fing to plices. Melican man lookie out for air-ship. Breakee all up!"

The air had assumed a copper hue. There was an unearthly stillness all about, even the sea seeming like a motionless mirror.

At once Frank, as well as the other voyagers, comprehended the truth.

A Chinese torando was at hand. What this meant they required no hint to tell.

Whole villages were often blown away by these frightful visitations of the elements. The damage possible was something fearful.

And the danger of damage to the air-ship was great.

Should the rotoscope or wings receive injury, then the party would be in a very serious predicament. What was to be done?

Pi Ho had incontinently fled for home with the other villagers. Every moment the darkness grew more intense.

Barney and Pomp were sufficiently recovered now to come on deck and assist.

The air-ship was carried over the cliffs to the shelter of a high banking so that it would escape as much of the wind as possible.

The rotoscope was firmly secured and the wings were lashed. Then ropes were passed over the deck and secured to stumps and rocks, anchoring the ship firmly.

Of course, the air-ship could have attempted to ascend above the storm, but Frank feared that they would be caught before a sufficient height could be reached.

Of course the very quickest of work was needed to perfect these things. But they were executed.

Then the storm broke.

With a bellow like that of a thousand fiends, it struck the sea and then the cliffs.

For a time it was utterly impossible for the voyagers to tell whether the air-ship was being whirled through space or whether it yet held its anchorage.

But after what seemed an age, the tropic storm passed almost as quickly as it had come. A scene of devastation was upon every hand.

The air-ship had stood the blow fairly well. Some of the anchor ropes had yielded and the braces of the rotoscope had parted.

This had twisted the shaft severely, and Barney cried:

"Shure, Misther Frank, we are laid up agin. That will never worruk!"

This was true. The rotoscope shaft had once more suffered injury. This would occasion an aggravating delay.

But the voyagers congratulated themselves that the denizens of the vicinity were friendly to them. The damage to the air-ship was repairable at least.

Just at this moment Pi Ho and a number of his countrymen appeared upon the scene.

They brought the gratifying news that Hash Ku had escaped the path of the tornado entirely, though it was announced that a vessel was ashore upon the beach below.

And Pi Ho made a startling declaration. "Me fink it am pirate ship allee samee Hop Sing!" he cried. "Maybe they fightee us killee all in Hosh Ku."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PIRATES' ATTACK.

THE declaration of Pi Ho was an astounding one.

"The pirate ship of Hop Sing ashore upon the beach below!" cried Frank. "How do you know that, Pi Ho?"

"Me knowee flag," replied the Chinaman. "Hop Sing's men fightee our people flo sure. Killee all in Hosh Ku."

Frank's eyes flashed.

"No, they won't!" he declared; "don't you fear Hop Sing. I'll have something to say about that."

The excitement of the aerial voyagers was great. Tattle, Dr. Vaneyke and Barney went to the edge of the cliffs to take a look at the stranded ship.

They beheld a curious scene.

The Chinese pirate ship lay half upon her side; her bow was stove, but the force of the tornado and tidal wave had carried her far up on the shore.

Her decks swarmed with the pirates who were also engaged in carrying various effects ashore.

It was certain that she would never float again, and the pirates were making the best of the situation. They had not as yet discovered the presence of the air-ship.

The residents of Hosh Ku were in a fearful state of consternation.

That Hop Sing's bloodthirsty crew should thus drop down upon them was a contingency most alarming, and for which they were little prepared.

Unless they at once prepared to beat the savage crew off the fate of their little town was sealed.

"Begorra, it's a hard lukin' set they are!" declared Barney. "Shure, I'd niver want to meet them afther dark."

"I agree with you there, Barney," declared Tattle; "they are a bad lot."

"In our present crippled state I fear we

would have hard work to beat them off," averred Dr. Vaneyke in alarm.

"For that reason I think we had better make preparations at once for self-defense," said Tattle. "Let us go back and report to Frank."

No time was lost in this. They made their way back to the Air-Dragon and gave Frank a startling account of all. The young inventor listened with interest.

"But I think we can hold them at bay!" he said confidently.

"Have you a plan?" asked Tattle.

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Where is Pi Ho? Ah, call him to me!"

Pi Ho was upon the cliff studying the pirates' actions from the cover of a boulder. He came hastily at call.

"Pi Ho!" said Frank, earnestly, "if you and your people will do as I say, I think we can whip those pirates!"

The Celestial ducked his head with delight.

"Melican man say, Chinese man do!" he replied. "Heap teller allee same!"

"Yes!" replied Frank; "go at once to your head mandarin, and bring him here with forty or fifty of your stoutest men. Now make all haste!"

"Me do it; Melican man see how quickee I go!"

Away went the nimble Celestial for the town. Tattle and Dr. Vaneyke, who had heard all, could not restrain their curiosity.

"Are you going to secure their co-operation, Frank?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, but not here!" replied the young inventor.

"Ah, I don't understand!"

"You will when they return. It is impossible for us to attempt the evading of this struggle. The rotoscope cannot be straightened out in time to once more get afloat!"

"If we could straighten it out, what an easy victory it would be!" said Tattle, with flashing eyes.

"Indeed, yes!" agreed Frank, "but I have a pretty safe plan."

Already Pi Ho was seen returning from the town, with the head mandarin and a large concourse of stalwart Celestials.

The mandarin Wun Su came up affably and saluted the aerial voyagers. He was attired in rich robes and carried a huge two handed sword.

Pi Ho acted as interpreter and very quickly Frank made known his plan.

It was received with acclamation by the Celestials.

And as their cheers rang out, they found echo below the cliffs, for the pirates had learned their presence and were even now mustering their forces for a raid upon the town.

Frank's plan was now materialized.

The air-ship was a bulky structure but very light. The half hundred powerful Chinese coolies advanced and putting their shoulders under it, lifted it with ease.

Frank's purpose was now understood.

"You see," explained the young inventor, "we can more easily defend the town from its position than from here. Moreover, union is strength. With the townspeople to help us, we can beat Hop Sing." "And perhaps rescue Myrtle Lane," said Tattle.

"If she is on board that ship, she must and shall be rescued!"

Toward the town the coolies carried the air-ship. The excitement was now most intense.

All the inhabitants of the place rushed out of the gates to meet the concourse. The air was filled with their excited cries.

The aerial voyagers yet remained on the deck of the air-ship and took in the novel situation with interest.

Frank selected a place just within the city gates, and which commanded the approach.

Here the air-ship was set down.

Preparations were at once made for a battle.

The electric guns were depressed and sighted, and projectiles of dynamite placed in them.

Scouts were already coming in every moment reporting the action of Hop Sing and his men.

Barney and Pomp were right in their element.

A conflict with the pirates suited them, and they were anxiously waiting for the crisis to come.

"Golly! if dey don't fink dey hab run up agin a earthquake den I will treat!" declared Pomp.

"Begorra, they'll be afther thinkin' a cyclone has struck them," averred Barney, confidently.

"Don't be too sure," said Frank, with a laugh. "They may give us a harder fight than we think for."

"But they kain't lick dis air-ship!" asserted Pomp; "one shot f'om de lectric gun jes' make dem see stars!"

The mandarin Wun Su was anxious to come aboard as was also Pi Ho. But Frank made an excuse to prevent their doing so.

He remembered Mut Su hiding in the cabin, and realized the possible danger of the Japanese envoy.

To be sure the war spirit was not active in Hosh Ku, yet the sight of a Jap on board the air-ship might arouse distrust and cause trouble.

Frank deemed it safer to avoid any such discovery.

So he did not allow any of the Celestials to come on the deck, politely circumventing each such endeavor.

A crisis was fast approaching.

The pirates were now reported as coming up through the cleft in the cliff in full force.

Already distant firing was heard as the outposts and scouts of the Chinese force were driven in. The storm was about to burst.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DEMAND FOR SURRENDER.

FRANK waited until the attacking force came in view.

Then, as the pirates appeared over the rise of land, it was easy to understand why the coast people stood in such deadly fear of them.

A more ruffianly, villainous set of human beings could hardly be imagined.

They were bristling with arms and even dragged a cannon between them. This gave Frank a thrill of alarm.

The air-ship had nothing to fear from the small arms of the foe, but a single cannon shot might destroy her.

So Frank watched the manipulation of this with deepest interest.

On came the swarm of pirates.

They were exchanging rapid shots with the inhabitants, but no effort of the latter seemed to check them.

Superior courage and fighting ability counted in their favor.

They evidently reckoned upon an easy conquest, for it was certain that they did not know of the presence of the air-ship.

Frank smiled grimly.

He continued to watch the cannon. This alone was what he feared.

Tattle and Vaneyke stood anxiously by his side.

"Isn't it pretty near time to give them a salute, Frank?" asked the doctor.

"Had we better allow them to get much nearer?"

"Don't fear!" said the young inventor, coolly, "they shall not get the best of us if I can help it!"

Then he saw that the critical moment had arrived. He stepped into the gun-room and sighted the electric gun.

As he did so, he saw that the pirates had brought their cannon suddenly to bear upon the gates.

Before Frank could draw a line upon the piece it was fired. The ball struck the right gate, shivered it into atoms and carried away one of the rotoscope braces.

It was a close call for the air-ship. Frank hesitated not a moment.

He drew a line hastily upon the gun and fired.

There was a tremendous roar and a lightning-like blaze. The projectile struck the ground directly in front of the cannon.

High up into the air rose a pile of debris, mingled with shattered human forms.

When this settled and the smoke cleared away, nothing remained of the cannon that was visible.

It was literally buried in a mighty hole in the ground which the dynamite, with its awful explosive power, had made.

For a moment a hush followed the terrific explosion. The astounded pirates were at a complete loss to understand this ebullition.

Then consternation most fearful seized them.

The Hosh Kuites at once began to cheer and open a fresh fire upon their assailants.

It was a thrilling moment.

The Mandarin Wun Su danced and shouted like a wild man in the excess of his delight.

Oh, if his people might once beat the pirates it would be the consummation of a mighty end. Victory was precious.

Frank saw that his opportunity had come. While yet the pirates were in confusion he sent shell after shell into their ranks.

All the hosts of Jove could not stand before such terrific onslaught. The pirate crew had no alternative. They broke and fled.

The side of the eminence over which they had come looked like a plowed field.

Over the cliffs the pirates fled. It was momentary victory for the defenders of the town.

To say that they were overjoyed would be a mild statement.

They flocked about the air-ship, and for a time all was pandemonium. But the assailants had not by any means abandoned the attack.

Suddenly, and while the joy of the Hosh Kuites was at its height a hissing, screaming sound was heard and a shell fell in the midst of the vast multitude.

It exploded with terrific force, killing several of the Celestials and wounding others.

"Mercy on us!" cried Tattle. "They are going to give us a hot one yet, Frank."

The young inventor realized the truth of this.

He knew that the pirates had brought ashore another gun and meant to shell the town.

They had at once got the exact line. This was almost certain destruction for the air-ship and the town. For a moment Frank was appalled.

Shell after shell came flying down into the town.

The light framed houses of the Chinese went up like tinder. Fires began to rage. Every moment the shells were dropping nearer the air-ship.

"Something has got to be done to stop that, Frank," said Dr. Vaneyke.

"I know it," said the young inventor very coolly.

The pirates were protected by a distant elevation, behind which they were secure from a direct aim.

But Frank elevated the muzzle of his electric gun and placed a dynamite shell in the breech.

Then judging the distance as best he could he threw it into the air. It fell far away.

A distant roar was heard. Whether it had taken effect or not it was not easy to say.

But as the enemy continued to throw their shells, it was known that the cannon of the foe had not been silenced as yet.

So Frank proceeded to throw the shells just as fast as he could, elevating the muzzle of the gun at every shot.

Suddenly the firing of the pirates ceased. At once a shout went up from all on board.

"You've shut 'em up, Frank!" cried the doctor.

It certainly seemed so, and Frank ceased firing.

But this conclusion proved premature. The purpose of the pirates turned out to be a very much different one.

Suddenly over the distant elevation a pirate appeared holding aloft a white flag.

"A truce!" cried Tattle, "perhaps they've had enough of it, Frank."

"I think their purpose is far different," said the young inventor. "We shall see—let him come down!"

The truce bearer advanced nearer, and when within speaking distance Pi Ho went out and brought him to the air-ship.

Frank met him at the rail. Pi Ho acted as interpreter.

"Well!" said Frank, sharply. "What is your errand here?"

"My captain, Hop Sing, sends greeting," interpreted Pi Ho. "He will cease firing upon the town if you will surrender!"

This demand created a sensation.

Frank laughed quietly.

"Tell him to go back, Pi Ho," he said, "and tell his master that if he does not surrender we will hunt him from the face of the earth."

Pi Ho communicated this emphatic announcement to the truce-bearer. The wretch showed his teeth, gave his pig tail a vicious twitch, and retorted.

"Then you shall all die. Hop Sing knows no mercy. Beware his vengeance. His sword is keen."

With which threat he strode away. Over the eminence he went and out of sight. Frank proceeded to train his gun once more.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOP SING'S CUNNING RUSE.

AFTER what seemed a reasonable time for the truce bearer to have delivered his message Frank sent another shell over the ridge.

It exploded in the distance. The effect of the reply to the truce was now made manifest.

Also the purpose of the pirates in sending the truce was revealed and in a startling manner.

Up into the air rose one of the enemy's shells.

"Jericho!" gasped Tattle. "They've changed their position, Frank!"

This was true.

The shell came from a point far to the right of the first position. It was evident that this had been found necessary as Frank had been getting perilously near them with his shells.

This was a most disappointing state of affairs.

It necessitated getting a new range and changing the altitude of the gun as well.

But Frank made the best of it, and proceeded to charge the gun. Once more he began the experimental shooting.

This time chance aided him.

The very first shot proved a timely one. There was a terrific roar in the distance, and no more shells came tearing into Hosh Ku.

The enemy's gun was silenced. Prolonged cheering followed this announcement.

Right valiantly had Frank Reade, Jr., and his disabled air-ship thus far defended the town.

But Frank knew that this meant only a brief respite. The pirates would only get another gun, and come back to the attack.

He realized that a desperate coup-de-main was necessary, and instantly decided upon a daring plan.

He called Pi Ho to him.

"Consult your mandarin!" he said. "And see if he can give me five hundred armed men!"

"Allee light, Melican man!" replied Pi Ho.

He hastily consulted with Wun Su, the mandarin. The answer quickly came back.

"Wun Su say yeppe. He go too, so Pi Ho allee once. Melican man heap say so."

"All right!" cried Frank. "Muster your men—quick!"

Instantly Pi Ho and the mandarin began to gather their army together. Tattle and Dr. Vaneyke now asked:

"What is the move now, Frank?"

The young inventor explained.

"I am going to take five hundred of these fellows," he said, "and make a sally with them."

"Is it not risky?"

"We will be two to one. If they will only stick by me I think we can whip the pirates out of their boots and capture their ship."

"And perhaps rescue Myrtle Lane?"

"Yes."

"A rousing good plan!" cried Tattle. "But you are not going to lead them alone, Frank?"

"Why not?"

"Not much. I am going with you."

"And I!" cried the doctor.

"No!" said Frank, decisively. "You must stay by the ship, Vaneyke. I will leave it in yours and Mut Su's care."

"Very well," agreed the scientist, who was willing enough to admit that he was too aged for so rough a sally. "I will remain on guard."

So it was arranged.

Frank with Tattle and Barney and Pomp all armed with Winchesters placed themselves at the head of the Celestials.

When it is understood that not one fourth of this number carried fire-arms and only two-handed swords, it can be understood that the battle with the pirates was bound to be conducted on quite even terms.

Led by the brave aerial voyagers, this body of fighting men rushed down over the cliff to attack the pirates.

As Frank came in sight of the stranded vessel he saw that his inference had been correct.

The pirates were transporting another cannon from the wreck. The attack was made none too soon.

There was no opportunity to spring a surprise upon the pirates. They saw the coming attack in full season to be prepared for it.

At once they rallied on the beach, and then met the fire of the attacking party.

For a few moments affairs were extremely lively. Numbers of the pirates fell with the fire of the first attack.

Then they returned the fire with deadly effect.

Barney was slightly wounded in the shoulder. Pomp lost a piece of his scalp, and Frank was shot through the sleeve three times.

But still they kept on. Fully a score of the Hosh Kuites lay dead on the beach.

Ordinarily this would have routed them; but the example of their white leaders inspired them. The next moment they were at close quarters.

This Frank had reckoned upon as the winning stroke.

With weight of numbers he hoped to overwhelm the pirate crew. His hypothesis was a correct one.

The plan worked admirably. The pirates were forced back, even into the surf.

The hand to hand fight was bloody and desperate.

The Chinese citizens remembered a hundred wrongs and were eager to avenge the death of many slaughtered relatives. The pirates knew that to repulse the foe was their only hope of escaping utter annihilation.

Frank and his friends had withdrawn from the contest and did not strive to check it.

They realized the futility of this. It would have been easier to have stemmed the ocean tide.

Some of the pirates escaped by reaching the cliffs; others swam across the little bay.

And in the midst of the melee what was an unfortunate thing for the voyagers was the fact that they failed to notice a small lateen sailed boat which put out from the stern of the stranded vessel, through the surf and into the bay.

Not until the battle was over and the search of the vessel for Myrtle Lane was made did the truth become known.

Then it was too late, for the sail boat was far out to sea.

The Hosh Kuites were cheering wildly over their victory when Frank and Tattle, with Barney and Pomp, climbed over the rail.

"I only hope we shall find her aboard this ship," said Frank, hopefully, "or, at least, some trace of her whereabouts."

"We will hope for the best," said Tattle.

But though a thorough search was made no trace of the captive girl was found. But in a small stateroom, which had evidently been occupied by her, Tattle found an inscription upon the woodwork by a dead-eye window. Thus it read:

"Alas, I fear my rescue will come too late. I see my friends now on the shore, but my captors are launching a small boat from the rear of the ship and I know that

they mean to take me with them. God help me! Should this reach the eyes of a friend, for God's sake, come to my rescue. I am sure they will now take me to their stronghold at Nana Pashi. I trust in Heaven.

MYRTLE LANE."

The reading of this thrilling revelation created a great sensation.

CHAPTER XIX.

A NEW PERIL.

THE reading of Myrtle Lane's message upon the woodwork of her state-room on board the pirate ship created a great sensation.

Frank Reade, Jr., Tattle, Barney and Pomp, all looked at each other, and Tattle gave a startled cry.

"What a fool I was!" he cried. "I thought I saw a boat put out from the rear of the ship through the surf. I had ought to have guessed the truth."

"The cunning Hop Sing has escaped with her again, and doubtless will go straight to Nana Pashi!" declared Frank. "We must go back to Hosh Ku at once, repair the rotascope, and pursue him. Come all."

Part of the Hosh Kuites had gone over the cliffs to chase to the death the remnant of the pirate crew.

But the genial Pi Ho was on hand, and at once agreed with Frank's premise that Hop Sing had fled to Nana Pashi.

"He heap sharp Chinese man!" declared the Celestial. "Berry hard catchee him. Say so, Pi Ho go wif Melican man findee Hop Sing."

Frank, however, was obliged to decline this very kind offer.

There were more voyagers aboard the air-ship now than was really advisable. Besides, he was just as certain of finding the pirates' stronghold for he had the advice of Mut Su to rely upon.

Back to the town went the aerial voyagers accompanied by a part of the victorious soldiers.

Their reception at Hosh Ku was in the nature of an ovation. The natives all greeted them with the wildest demonstrations.

Dr. Vaneyke, it need hardly be said, was glad to welcome them back.

"What now, Frank," he asked.

"First of all, to repair the air-ship, and then to Nana Pashi," replied the young inventor.

"You think the villain will go thither?"

"Yes."

Dr. Vaneyke looked incredulous.

"If he is the sharp rascal I think he is," he said, "he will not go there at all. He will endeavor to blind pursuit by switching off in another direction."

"I should think there was logic in your presumption if I did not know that it is difficult for a pirate to land anywhere along the coast between here and Nana Pashi with safety. I believe hence that Hop Sing will strive to reach his colleagues in the quickest possible way," declared Frank, confidently.

"You may be right," said the doctor. "It would be an easy matter to overtake him now if the rotascope was all in working order."

"Indeed it would. It is a pity. However, we must make the best of it. Hop Sing will doubtless reach Nana Pashi hours ahead of us."

"How long will it take to repair the rotascope, Frank?" asked Tattle.

"Not so very long; perhaps a whole day," replied the young inventor.

"Well," cried the reporter, eagerly, "I don't see why we cannot catch the rascal. He surely cannot make Nana Pashi in one day with that sail boat."

"Ah, but the repairing of the rotascope is a small matter compared with the other repairs."

"Other repairs?"

"Why, certainly! The storm so jarred the electrical machinery that it must all be overhauled, and doubtless some parts of it will have to be renewed. This will require several days."

Mut Su in the cabin gave a groan.

"And I must remain penned up here in this fashion all this while!" he exclaimed despondently. "I shall certainly have nervous prostration."

"I am sorry for you," laughed Frank. "I can suggest only one idea."

"What is that?" asked the envoy, eagerly.

"Remain secluded in the day time and go out at night."

"Ah, but that is also risky. At any moment I might run into some of these Chinese, who would cut me to pieces without mercy."

"Ah, but wear a disguise!"

However, Mut Su decided to remain closely in the cabin until after the air-ship should have left Hosh Ku.

Thus far his presence on board had not been suspected.

The aerial voyagers were treated with the utmost kindness and respect by the townspeople, who regarded them as their deliverers from the pirates.

Even had it been discovered that a Japanese envoy was aboard the Air Dragon and under the protection of Frank Reade, Jr., it is doubtful if the peaceful Hosh Kuites would have ventured to attack the air ship.

So Frank felt perhaps more secure than did Mut Su, who lived in a constant spell of dread and apprehension.

Meanwhile work on the repairing was going on rapidly.

As Frank had declared it did not take long to repair the rotoscope.

Its guards were unbolted and the shaft lowered to the deck. Then an anvil was procured, with bellows and a forge, and in a very short while the bent shaft was straightened.

But the intricate electrical machinery required time and careful manipulation.

Frank worked early and late and at the expiration of three days it really looked as if the air ship would soon be ready to fly.

By this time it was reckoned that Hop Sing must have reached Nana Pashi.

Had the repairs of the air-ship been accomplished but one day earlier, many thrilling and trying incidents had been avoided.

But this was not to be.

At noon of the third day, an exciting report reached Hosh Ku.

A large body of the Emperor's troops, infantry, horse and artillery, were approaching the town.

Full six thousand strong was the army which was on its way to a harbor fifty miles below to prevent the Japanese from landing an attacking force which was supposed to co-operate with the general advance upon Monkden.

At their head rode the most bigoted and merciless heathen in the whole of China, Gen. Hi Hing. He was one of the Emperor's favorite officers and had sworn to burn and disembowel a thousand Japanese with his own hand before the year should go out.

The loyal Chinese in Hosh Ku prepared to give the advancing hosts a patriotic reception. But there were many non-sympathizers with the war, who were disposed to regard the matter with apathy.

Frank Reade, Jr., was not a little concerned about the situation, and called Pi Ho and the mandarin, Wun Su.

They assured him that Gen. Hi Hing should have a eulogistic account of the service done the town, and that he need fear no molestation.

However, in spite of this, Frank felt not a little uneasy, as did all the others aboard the air-ship.

Mut Su was intensely excited.

"They will have my head!" he declared.

"I tell you I shall not live to see my emperor again. I know this Hi Hing. He is a lawless and brutal scamp!"

Frank Reade, Jr., shut his lips firmly.

"There is one thing we can do," he declared. "We can sell our lives as dearly as possible."

"But not on my account," protested Mut Su.

"They shall not take you!" declared Frank, rigidly. "You are under my protection."

CHAPTER XX.

THRILLING SCENES.

THE envoy could not restrain his feelings of gratitude at this.

He seized Frank's hand and pressed it to his heart.

"If you ever come to my emperor's court, I will prove to you that a Japanese never forgets a favor done him."

"I have a plan, which I think would be better for us and safer for Mut Su," declared Tattle.

This announcement created a sensation. All eyes were upon him.

"What can that be?" asked Frank.

"A very simple thing," replied the reporter. "Let Mut Su put on a disguise, get a small boat, and put out to sea. We can then join him and pick him up at some point on the coast after we get the air ship again in sailing trim."

There was a moment of silence.

Certainly the plan possessed its feasible and sensible points. But on the whole Frank decided that it was not advisable.

"At this late hour I think there would be a great deal to risk!" he declared.

"There is no reason why Mut Su's presence aboard this ship should be suspected. Under the protection of Pi Ho and Wun Su, the mandarin I think we will be safe!"

So the matter rested.

But near events proved that Frank's theory was most erroneous, and serious results transpired.

Meanwhile, the Chinese host was rapidly advancing upon Hosh Ku.

The distant roll of drums was plainly heard, and finally the mighty array came into view.

It was a strange and barbarous sight this Chinese army. Picturesque to a certain degree, but heathenish beyond compare.

Our voyagers gazed upon it with deep interest. Tattle was right in his element, and was doing excellent work with his note-book.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pomp, "dey don' look much lak de Southern sogers in time ob de civil war. I jes' remember dat well nuf fo' I was jes' comin' out ob mah pick-aniny clo'es."

"Begorra, av all I've heard is throe," declared Barney, "shure dat cudn't have bin much, for be me troth, I niver knew dat pickanninies wore clothes."

Pomp at once flared up.

"Don' yo' sassify me, 'fish!" he cried, angrily. "Yo' am finkin' ob de po' white trash lak de 'fish. I b'longed to a speccable cullud fambly, I did, an' don' yo' frow no insinooations!"

Everybody laughed at this, but Barney, usually ready for a ruction, preserved a contemptuous silence in Frank's presence.

Nearer now the marching Chinese drew. Then some of the leading citizens of the town went out to meet the general's staff which was advancing mounted on Barbary ponies.

As the pompous Hi-Hing rode up with his throng of retainers and servile officers, the town representatives prostrated themselves as if before the Emperor, instead of his bigoted representative.

"Begorra, wud yez luk at the fools!" cried Barney. "Shure yez would think it wuz the Pope."

"To be sure, we don't have any such slavish exhibition in free America," declared Tattle. "After all, it is the best country in the world!"

"Nobody will dispute that," declared Dr. Vaneyke.

After the servile ceremony of bidding the army welcome to the town, the general and a detachment of his soldiers rode down into the streets.

Frank Reade, Jr., drew a deep breath. He knew that the critical moment had come. But he was ready.

Though none of the others knew it, he had carefully placed shells in the electric guns and had them all ready for use.

He knew that the artillery of the Chinese army was to be feared, but in case of a battle he was resolved to be completely ready.

There was much ceremony of greeting and making welcome the Chinese general so that it was some while before his attention was called to the air-ship.

The result was startling.

In tones of thunder the Chinese commander ordered up his bodyguard and rode down to the little square where the Air-Dragon rested.

Then he gazed upon the aerial wonder for some while with the deepest of apparent interest. But a close observer would have seen a covetous gleam in his eye.

Wun Su, the mandarin, endeavored to illustrate the powers and peculiarities of the air-ship to the Chinese general. He might have spared himself the trouble.

For Hi Hing had heard of the Air-Dragon already. He had been at Koshu when the air-ship first arrived off the Korean coast, and when it so narrowly escaped being brought down by the cannon of the forts.

At the time he had issued a proclamation promising a mighty reward to the party or parties who would capture the air-ship and press it into the service of China.

For the wily commander saw that with it he could easily hope to whip the intolerant Japanese and subjugate the entire island.

So it can be easily imagined with what sensations of evil triumph and malicious intent he now gazed upon the air-ship, apparently within his clutches.

He disregarded entirely the explanations and words of the mandarin. A frenzy seemed to seize him.

Without pausing to consult the voyagers at all he issued hurried and excited orders. These were obeyed with flying haste.

Up came a detachment of coolies. They were armed not with rifles or muskets, but with axes and ropes.

"What the deuce are they going to do?" exclaimed Tattle, in amazement; "they are not even civil, Frank!"

"Never mind!" said the young inventor, coolly. "We'll soon bring them to terms!"

Into the ground the coolies drove great stakes. Then they essayed to draw the ropes over the air-ship's deck.

Frank saw their rascally purpose, which was to prevent the air-ship taking flight. He smiled at the simplicity of the Chinese general.

But the move also aroused his anger. He decided that matters had gone far enough.

So he boldly stepped out on deck and in his loudest voice proceeded to forbid the rascals in their work. The effect was most exciting.

The coolies disregarded his commands, whereupon Frank cried:

"Barney and Pomp! Take your axes and cut those ropes!"

Instantly the order was obeyed. The two servitors cut the ropes as fast as they could reach them. One of the coolies attempted to interfere with Barney and the Celt squared off at him.

"Yez murtherin' haythin'," he cried, "I'll take the heart av yez!"

With which he parried a blow of the yellow rascal's ax-handle, and let drive with his stout fist.

It struck the coolie fair upon the point of the jaw, and gave him such a tremendous shock that he tumbled over insensible.

In a moment a sequence of thrilling scenes were enacted.

The Chinese general roared orders like a lion. Down the street there came dashing a detachment of troops.

These were proceeding to deploy about the air-ship, when Frank turned the muzzle of the electric gun full upon Hi Hing and his staff and shouted:

"You unmannerly yellow dogs! I'll teach you politeness if you dare to attack this air-ship further. Keep your distance or you die."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE COLLOQUY WITH A CHINESE GENERAL.

HI HING was in just the position to look full into the muzzle of the electric gun.

He did not know its power, but he felt that it might hold death for him. Though unscrupulous he was not foolhardy.

So he shouted a hasty order.

In a moment the soldiers ceased their advance. Then Frank advanced to the rail.

At this moment Pi Ho and Wun Su were seen to remonstrate with Hi Hing.

At once Frank shouted:

"Dare not to attack this air-ship! We are under the protection of the American flag! We are American citizens!" and

Frank pointed to the stars and stripes waving over the air-ship.

This, however, did not seem to impress Hi Hing in the least. It was interpreted by Pi Ho.

Then the answer came.

"This is a time of war and the friends of the emperor are justified in seizing whatever can be made of use to China. You are upon China soil and your air-ship is confiscated to the uses of this army."

Frank retorted that though this might seem logic, it was not international law, and warned Hi Hing to trouble the Air Dragon at his peril.

Now the Chinese commander knew well

and distant three hundred yards, I will blow it to powder with one shot."

Hi Hing returned a jeering reply; yet his curiosity was aroused, and he expressed a desire to see the boast of the American verified.

He qualified this desire with a threat.

"If you fail to keep your word I will have you drawn and quartered."

This angered Frank, and for a time he half decided to blow the bigot and his horde off the face of the earth. But after awhile he overruled this, and drew a line upon the distant boulder with the forward gun.

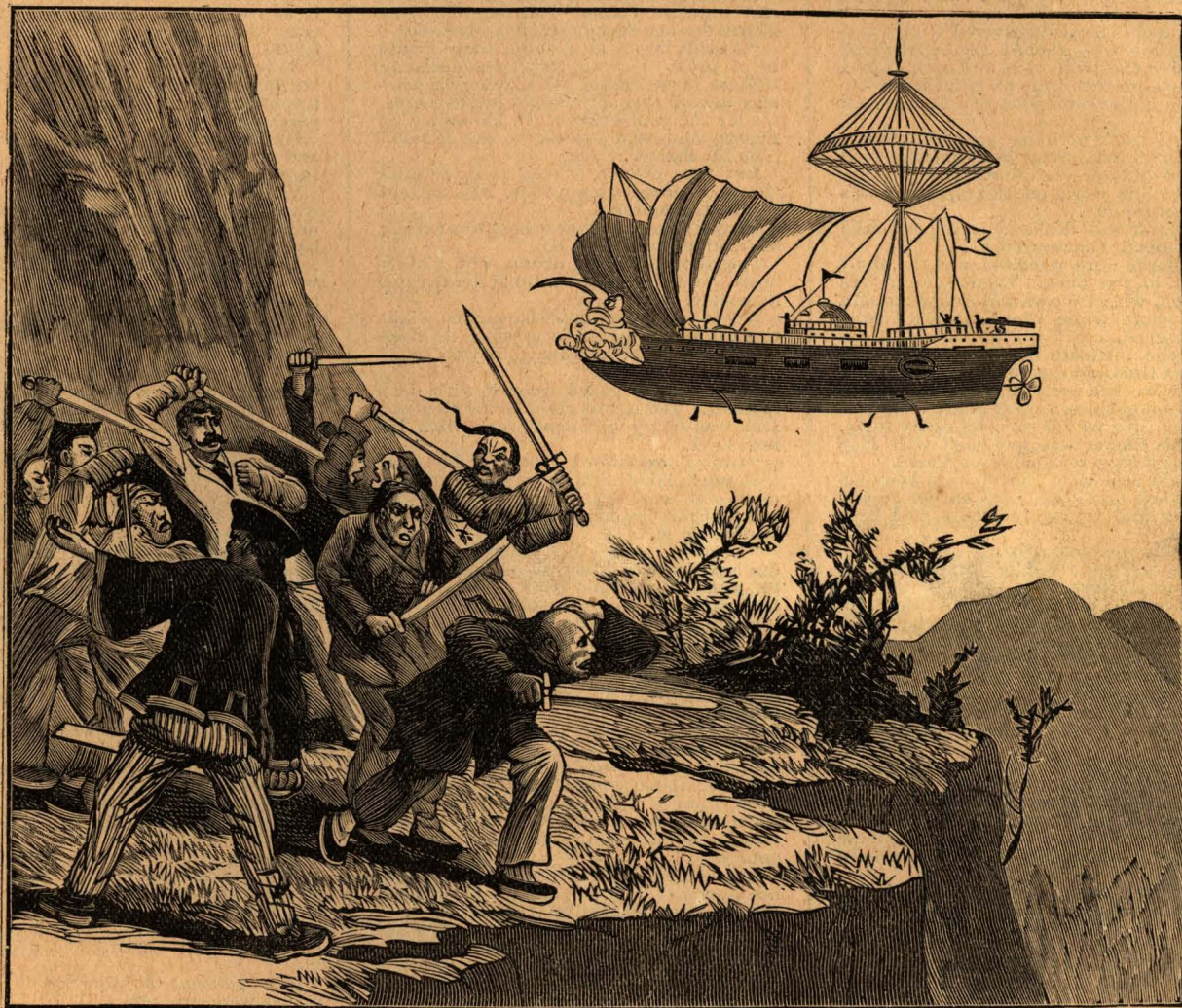
In lieu of the regular charge he placed two of the projectiles, or dynamite shells,

Pi Ho and Wun Su, who had seen the operation of the electric gun before, were amazed.

But they were shrewd enough to turn it to the advantage of their friends, and Pi Ho took it upon himself to shout in the Chinese tongue:

"Rise, servant of the Great Sun! The American wizard spares your life upon the condition that you treat him as a distinguished foreigner should be treated."

With this Hi Hing arose. He now essayed a more agreeable conversation with Frank, and assured him that he was his friend, and that he renounced his right to seize the air ship in the name of the emperor.



THERE, WITH HIS BACK AGAINST A CLIFF, WAS A MAN, DRESSED IN EUROPEAN GARB AND PLAINLY NOT A NATIVE OF CHINA, HOLDING A DOZEN FURIOUS CELESTIALS AT BAY. HE WIELDED A HUGE JAPANESE SWORD OF THE PATTERN CARRIED BY THE SOLDIERY, AND WAS MAKING A BOLD BID FOR HIS LIFE AGAINST THE FEARFUL ODDS.

enough that Frank was right, but this made little difference to him.

He was anxious to possess the air ship, and this overruled his good sense and discretion.

So he replied:

"You will deliver up your air ship to us or we shall proceed to take it by force!"

This angered Frank.

"I possess some powerful dynamite guns," he retorted. "If you dare to attack me I will certainly blow you to perdition, you and your army!"

Hi Hing evidently regarded this as a bluff, for he replied:

"What are your puny guns compared to our batteries of field pieces? I could turn fifty cannon upon you in an hour's time."

"One of my guns is worth more than your field pieces all put together," returned Frank. "If you wish I will prove it to you. See yonder huge boulder on the cliff? Though it is hundreds of tons in weight,

into the breach. Then he drew a careful line.

It was but a moment's work to press the electric button.

Whish! Click! Snap!

This was all that was heard for an infinitesimal instant. Then there was a roar like a thousand cannon—like the awful burst of a concentration of heaven's most dread artillery.

A great cloud of dust, fragments and smoke rose high in the air.

Hi Hing rubbed his heathen eyes. Was it a miracle or witchcraft? The boulder had vanished.

Words cannot express the effect of this demonstration upon the ignorant commander.

For a moment he was dazed. Then he did the very last thing which a brave and enlightened man would have done.

This was to slip from his pony and fall upon his face. His example perforce was followed by all of his staff.

"But the Great Sun will make a prince of you and give you wealth uncounted, if you will lend your air ship to his cause."

To which Frank replied tersely:

"I will not fight for you nor for Japan. I came hither to defend the American colonists upon your shores. Having done that, I have done my duty."

After a while Hi Hing withdrew. But it was noticed that his troops yet surrounded the air ship.

Vaneyke and Tattle now appeared on deck.

They had listened to all with the deepest of interest.

"Well," cried the doctor, with something like a thrill of triumph, "you brought the scamp to terms!"

"Yes," replied Frank, "but I am afraid it is only a temporary truce."

"Temporary?"

"Yes. I don't trust the rascal at all. He will break his word as easily as a stick if he thinks he can do it safely!"

"I agree with you!" declared Tattle, "he is the most consummate scoundrel on the face of the earth. My word for it, he is up to some devilish trick now!"

"Begorra, then we'd better be ready for him," said Barney.

"That we will!" declared Frank; "the best thing we can do is to get the air-ship repaired and ready to fly as quickly as possible!"

Mut Su was consulted and said:

"Be sure that Hi Hing is not to be trusted for a moment. He is the greatest rascal alive."

Frank at once went below and was at work on the machinery industriously,

air-ship. To say that the voyagers were terrified and astonished is a mild statement.

Frank recovered himself. His eye flashed lightning.

"So he means war, does he?" he gritted, savagely. "Well, he shall have it, for I'll sweep every gun from that hill, or die in the attempt!"

CHAPTER XXII.

HI HING IS SUBDUED.

THERE was no question but that Frank Reade, Jr., was justified in retaliating upon the Chinese artillery, now that they had fired upon him.

A cheer broke from the lips of the aerial travelers. It was caught up by many of the Hosh Kuites.

"That's right, Frank," cried Tattle, "clear out the whole of them. Don't give them any chance to come to close quarters."

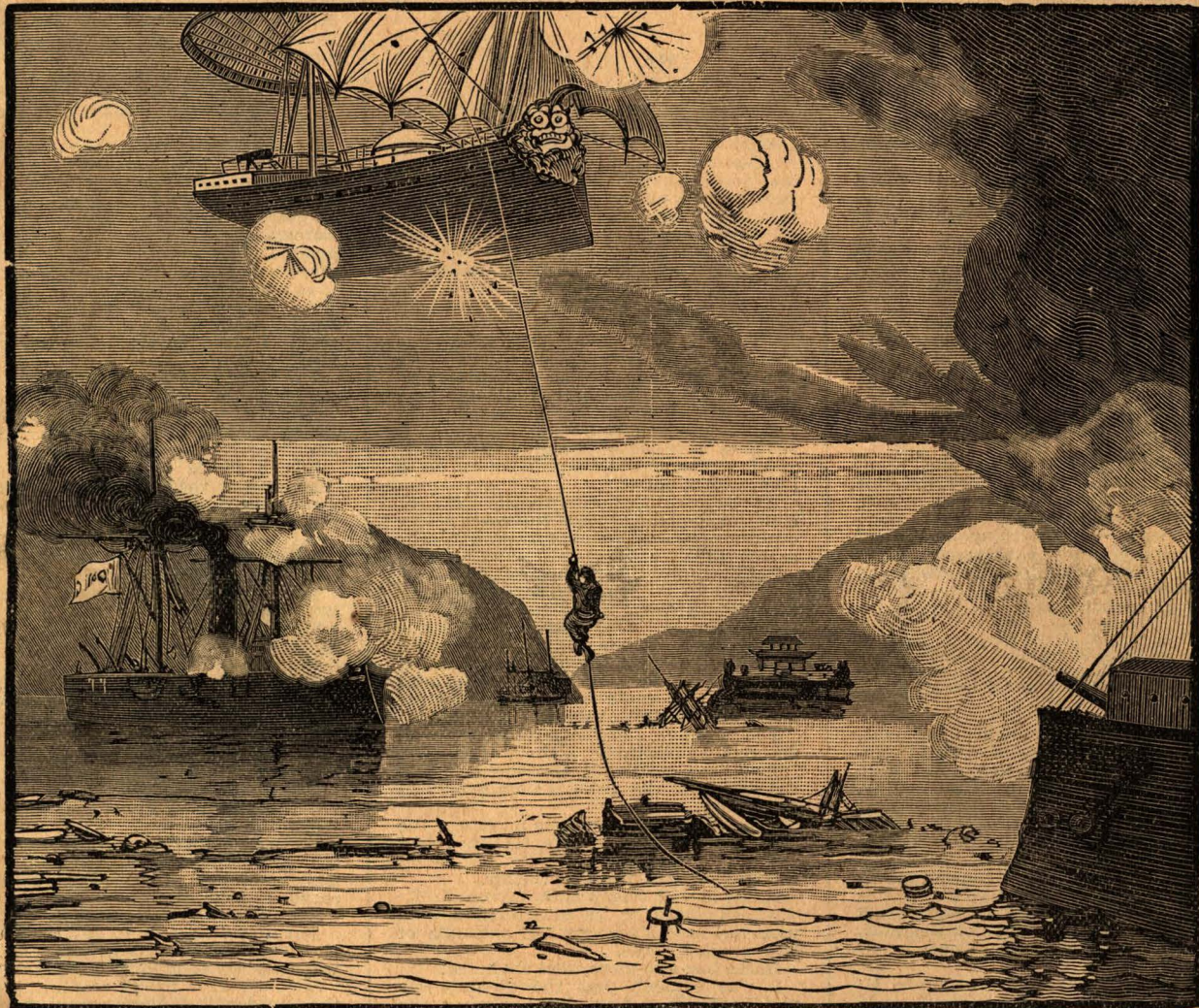
"I don't intend to," rejoined the young inventor, decisively.

Another battery which had been galloping up to the spot, now came to a stop.

Frank nevertheless sent a shell after it. It dismounted two of the guns and killed a number of men.

Hi Hing was furious.

He could be seen dashing about on his Barbary pony trying to bring up his army.



"LOWER THE SHIP, BARNEY!" CRIED FRANK. "I AM GOING TO SAVE THAT PLUCKY FELLOW." THE ORDER WAS OBEYED. THE AIR-SHIP SWEEPED DOWN CLOSE TO THE STRUGGLING JAP. A ROPE WAS THROWN HIM AND HE WAS QUICKLY DANGLING IN THE AIR.

when he was called on deck by Dr. Van-eyke.

"What is the matter now?" asked the young inventor as he came rushing up.

"We want you to observe what this very honorable Chinese General is doing," said the scientist.

And Frank did observe.

He saw that a large body of the Chinese artillery were occupying a commanding position over the town. The guns were being rapidly brought into place.

The young inventor was astounded.

"You don't believe the bigoted fool means to try and intimidate us?" he asked in stupefaction.

"He is a treacherous dog!" cried Mut Su, who had heard this in the cabin. "Look out for him! Ah, did I not tell you so?"

At that moment one of the guns swung into position. Quick as a flash its muzzle was depressed and there was a sullen roar as it was fired.

The ball passed just over the bow of the

Hi Hing's treachery was apparent. It angered Frank beyond all control.

"I'll sweep them from the face of the earth!" he gritted. "Such treachery shall be punished!"

There was no time to lose either. If one of the cannon shot should strike the air-ship the end would be assured swift and speedy.

Frank drew a line upon the battery and fired.

The dynamite shell struck in the midst of the park of guns. The result was thrilling.

A mound of earth was raised where they had stood. Guns and gunners were hurled high in the air.

When the smoke cleared away, hardly one of them was mounted. Over the eminence the surviving artillerymen were running for their lives.

The explosion had been a terrific one. The shells used by Frank were of the largest size and he had placed two in the gun.

Frank with grim purpose turned the electric gun full upon the rank and file of the infantry.

"If they advance I shall certainly annihilate them!" he declared; "it will be better for them to draw off."

"I should say so!" said Tattle.

Mut Su, from the cabin door, had been watching the scene with flashing eyes.

He was overjoyed.

"The pig heads richly deserve the lesson!" he cried. "You would be justified in exterminating the whole of them. You can know now why Japan is obliged to fight them."

"They will put their hands upon American citizens at their peril!" said Frank, determinedly.

"Begorra, Misther Frank, they're coming!" cried Barney.

This was true.

The distant rank and file of the infantry were advancing. It was certain that Hi

Hing meant another attack upon the air-ship.

Frank did not wait for a near range. If he had he could have slaughtered hundreds of them.

He had no desire to take life needlessly. He believed that he could give them such a fright that they would refrain from making the attack.

So he aimed for a point of land just in front of them. Then he fired the electric gun.

A great column of earth rose in the air where the shell struck. A small hillock was formed and a cavity blown in the surface of the plain which would almost have engulfed a company.

Many of the advancing Chinese were hurled violently to the ground. They were instantly checked.

"Another, Frank!" cried Dr. Vaneyke. "They will be sure to run then!"

The young inventor needed no bidding. He saw the opportunity and at once embraced it.

Boom—crash! another shell exploded in front of the enemy. Another and another was sent in the same direction.

Even had Hi Hing possessed the pluck to face that deadly fire himself, his troops had not and they broke into wildest confusion and fled.

Not until they had got beyond range of the deadly electric gun did they come to a halt. Hi Hing was baffled and deeply chagrined.

The Hosh Kuites could not restrain their joy and wildly thronged about the air-ship. They were by no means in sympathy with Hi Hing and his soldiery.

Pi Ho took occasion to say:

"Our people likee Melican men. Heap no likee Hi Hing. Glad Melican man whippee him."

The Chinese commander's swelled head, however, had lost none of its size, for down into the town presently came a messenger with a white flag.

The message was written upon a strip of rice paper in Chinese characters, and Pi Ho was called upon to interpret it, as Frank could not read it.

Thus the message read:

"Hi Hing, general of the forces of the Most High, sends warning to the foreigners of the flying ship and demands their unconditional surrender in the name of the Emperor on pain of death."

"Well," exclaimed Frank in amazement, "did you ever see the beat of that? Nobody but a bigoted Chinaman would have written such an idiotic message. Why, they are defeated and yet demand that we, the victors, surrender!"

"Hi Hing is a consummate thick-headed fool!" cried Tattle impatiently, "he deserves to have his army and himself blown to perdition for such effrontery!"

Frank would vouchsafe no reply at all to this ridiculous demand, and the messenger returned to his master empty handed.

What the effect of this was upon Hi Hing did not become manifest, for he made no further attempt to attack the air-ship.

Barney and Pomp meanwhile had been busy adjusting the machinery, with the result that Barney now appeared and declared:

"Shure, Mither Frank, I belave the air-ship is all roight to floy onct more."

"Good!" cried Frank. "Then we will waste no further time here."

The signal was given, adieu was said to the friendly Hosh Kuites, and then Frank pressed the rotascope and motor levers.

The rotascope whirled, the big wings made prodigious passes, and lightly and swiftly the air-ship arose.

As she swept aloft into the air a curious spectacle was revealed far below.

The entire Chinese army of Hi Hing had spread their ranks, and were fleeing like sheep in every direction for safety.

This caused the aerial voyagers a laugh. Mut Su ventured out on deck, and he was in high spirits.

"It would be easy to annihilate the whole thievish band of them!" he cried, "but America is not at war with China."

"No," replied Frank. "The Air Dragon is here solely to act in self defense and protect American citizens wherever found."

The air ship, therefore, left the scene quickly behind. The fears of the Chinese soldiers were needless.

Along the coast the Air Dragon now made rapid course.

It seemed, at last, as if the aerial voyagers were likely to reach the objective point of their journey, Nana Pashi, and the stronghold of the pirates.

There was no doubt but that Hop Sing and his fair captive had already reached that spot. If so, then no little skill, strategy and daring would be called for to effect her rescue.

But all of the aerial travelers were resolute and confident.

Just as nightfall was coming on, Mut Su handed his glass to Frank, and said:

"The headland of Nana Pashi is in clear view."

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT NANA PASHI.

THIS announcement of the envoy created something like a sensation.

With the aid of the glass, a distant line of blue extending out from the mainland, was made out to be the headland in which was the deep cavern of Nana Pashi and the pirates' stronghold.

"Then they are in a cavern?" asked Frank.

"Yes," replied Mut Su, "it is reputed to extend fully a mile under the cliffs."

"That is bad. They can the more easily baffle our attempts at rescue."

"That is true. Yet if you can employ strategy, or perhaps blockade the entrance to the cave, you may bring them to terms."

It seemed unfortunate that darkness was so near at hand.

But Frank said:

"They have doubtless sighted us already and it will not do to delay. We must make an attack at once."

By the time the air ship reached the vicinity of the pirates' den, the earth below could not be seen without the aid of the search-light.

This, however, was not employed, as Frank desired, if possible, to take the pirates by surprise.

However, that they were expected was quickly made manifest.

Fires were lighted upon the cliffs and at the mouth of the great cavern, and groups of armed men could be seen walking the beach and looking upward.

The stronghold of the pirates was well designed by nature for such a purpose.

Two long headlands, shooting out into the ocean like the claws of a crab, inclosed a deep bay.

This was hemmed in upon all except the ocean side with high cliffs. At the lower end of the bay was a mighty cliff rising full one hundred feet into the air.

In the face of this was the cavern.

At the mouth of the cavern there were wharves, at which now lay a couple of lateen sailed junks.

In the bay two more were anchored.

It was evident that the air-ship was plainly visible to the pirates against the sky, for now a scene of great excitement ensued below.

The yellow rascals ran hither and thither like sheep, and just as the aerial voyagers were wondering what their game was there occurred a tremendous explosion.

A shaft of flame leaped into the air and a huge shell passed just over the air-ship's thwart. It exploded fully a hundred yards beyond with deafening din, doing no harm though.

"By Jove!" cried Tattle; "that was a close call, Frank!"

"They mean business!" said Vaneyke. "You're right," agreed Frank. "We will shift position a little."

So the air-ship was sent up some hundred feet higher. The mortar used by the Chinese was not adequate to this increased distance.

Still they kept firing it and the shells burst sometimes just under the air-ship.

The din was frightful and unpleasant therefore, but Frank did not heed it.

He had focused the search-light upon the yellow crew and was studying the situation coolly.

He knew that he could easily silence the mortar whenever he should choose to do so.

What he desired to learn was the relative force of the pirates and how best an entrance could be effected to the cavern.

Seeing that they could not reach the air-ship, after a while the mortar ceased its firing.

Frank let the air-ship drift over the edge of the cliffs and out of range. Then Tattle said:

"What move shall we make, Frank? Have you decided?"

"Yes," replied the young inventor.

"Indeed!"

"I could destroy their ships and silence that mortar now. But for certain reasons I will defer such action until later. I will very quickly show you what I propose to do."

Frank allowed the air-ship to drift inland for nearly a mile. A high elevation must now hide it from the view of the pirates.

Frank here held the air-ship stationary. Then he stepped out on deck and said:

"I will now give you the plan I have decided upon!"

Of course the voyagers were all interested. They listened eagerly.

"We are now a mile or more from the coast," said Frank. "A descent can safely be made here. I propose to take two volunteers with me and descend to the ground. Whoever is left in charge of the air-ship is to return to the cliff and make it as troublous as possible for the pirates with the electric shells. Divert their attention while we are trying to find an entrance to the cavern. Do you see the idea?"

The aerial travelers cheered.

"That is a great scheme, Frank!" cried Tattle. "I will be one to go with you."

"Begorra, an' here's mesilf!" cried Barney.

"Then it is settled," cried Frank. "Throw over the rope ladder, Barney. Let us lose no time. Pomp, you will officiate in the pilot-house."

"A'right, sah!"

Frank felt a touch on the arm. He turned and faced Mut Su.

The Japanese was very eager in his manner, as he said:

"I beg of you to allow me to go also, Mr. Reade."

Frank hesitated.

This would leave only Pomp and the doctor aboard the air-ship. Yet it was not likely that Mut Su would be able to help them much.

"Very well," he said. "You shall go. But there will be great risk!"

Mut Su's eyes flashed.

"That is what I desire!" he said, firmly; "have no fear!"

The rope ladder was thrown over and the four men, Tattle, Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Mut Su, all armed to the teeth, descended to the earth.

All was as black as a pocket.

But they were able to find their way by the direction taken by the air-ship which went directly back to the pirates' cave.

Silently, with Frank leading the way, the four daring explorers crept over the intervening distance to the cliff.

The ground was, however, moderately smooth and they had soon covered the mile.

A great light shining against the sky showed them where the cliff was. The air-ship could be plainly seen hovering over it.

Then there was a distant flash and an earthquake like roar.

"That is one of the electric shells," whispered Tattle. "The pirates will have their hands full now."

"You are right," agreed Mut Su.

Frank led the way to the very brink of the cliff.

Thus far they had encountered no foe. The scene spread below was an exciting one.

But the reconnoiterers had given but one look at it when a startling thing happened.

From the shadows dark forms rushed.

In a twinkling the little party were surrounded. Swords flashed angrily in the semi-light, and a voice in the Chinese language cried:

"Stand and deliver! You are our prisoners!"

Only Mut Su's quick wit saved Barney from losing his head at that moment.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HEMMED IN.

THE moment the Chinese guard sprang out of the gloom, Barney leveled his rifle at them.

Down came a keen two-handed sword in the gloom.

It would have beheaded the Celt but for Mut Su. The envoy saw it, and quick as a flash thrust his rifle barrel before Barney.

The sword blade rang on the steel barrel, but glanced aside. Barney still lived.

Before another blow could be struck, Mut Su cried in the Chinese tongue:

"Hold! we may be friends! Who are you?"

"We serve the great Hi Chang, commander of the pirates. Who are you?"

"We are passing travelers!" replied Mut Su. But before he could say more one of the pirates had lit a wafer which, for a moment, illuminated the vicinity like day.

The result was thrilling.

The Chinese pirates saw three white foreigners and a hated foe. Savage curses rang out.

"Dog of a Japanese!"

"A spy—a spy!"

"Kill him! Quarter him!"

These cries were given in the Chinese language and therefore comprehensible only to Mut Su.

But he shouted in English:

"We are betrayed, Americans! Fight for your lives!"

With which he fired his rifle point blank at the Chinese. One of them dropped. It was the signal.

The Chinese pirates rushed forward, brandishing their swords. Luckily they were not armed with any other weapon.

Of course these stood no show with the rifles. The pirates were shot down before they could get near enough to do execution with their swords.

Frank had for the moment felt dismay, for he feared that they were certainly betrayed to the foe on the beach below.

He felt sure that the crack of the rifles must be heard by them.

But the booming of the shells made such a racket that the conflict on the cliff was unseen and unheard.

The Chinese guard was put to flight.

"They fled into the darkness."

"Hurrah!" cried Mut Su. "That is victory for us."

"Ah, but I fear it is premature," said Frank. "They will carry the news to those below."

"Then our plan is foiled," said Tattle, dismally.

"Begorra, I'm fer goin' for'ard!" cried Barney, resolutely.

"We surely will not turn back," declared Frank. "That is fully as dangerous as to go forward."

"Then let us go on!" cried Mut Su. "Lead the way, Mr. Reade."

Certainly the Japanese envoy could not be accused of a lack of courage. Frank lost no time.

Along the brow of the cliff all crept. If there was another entrance to the cavern than the one below, now was the time to find it.

Frank knew this well, and he followed some observations which he had made while on board the air-ship.

He had seen some Chinese suddenly appear at a point on the brow of the cliff just to the eastward of this point, and he believed that he should find something there.

His belief was verified.

He discovered a beaten path which led down through a cut in the face of the cliff. Down this the rescuing party went.

Slipping and sliding they went down for a hundred feet.

This brought them suddenly to a shelf of rock which seemed to jut out from the face of the cliff.

And here was the yawning mouth of a passage cut in the solid rock.

For a moment the rescuers stood overwhelmed with the force of their discovery. It was almost too good for belief.

"Is it safe to enter?" asked Tattle, trying to penetrate the gloom.

"Whether it is or not we will try it," said Frank, grimly.

With which he stepped boldly into the passage. A dim star of light was seen in the distance.

There was apparently none of the pirates in the near vicinity.

Without doubt this passage had been trusted to the guard just dispeiled by the rescuers. All the others doubtless were at the mouth of the big cavern.

Whether the defeated guard would be able to get word to their colleagues below in time to entrap the invaders remained to be seen.

As for the rescuers it was enough for them to know that they had found open and unguarded passage to their foes' stronghold.

They waited for nothing more.

Along the passage they went swiftly. The distant star of light grew bigger.

Soon it merged into a broad glare and then the party came to a point where the passage terminated in a large chamber.

Beyond this chamber was a gallery up which a great light came from the lower cavern.

Below there the pirates could be seen in a great throng. Many of them being brought in wounded from the effects of the deadly shells.

"Here we are," whispered Tattle.

"What are those figures in that opposite passage?"

"Women and children!"

This was true.

Huddled in the gallery passage were a great throng of Chinese women and children. They were the pirates' families.

Nana Pashi was literally a little kingdom, or rather nest of the pests of the China Sea. For a moment the rescuers gazed at them in amazement.

Then a sensation was created.

The women and children had spied them, and screaming with alarm began to retreat to the lower cavern.

Of course this attracted the attention of the pirates below, and in an instant the position of our rescuers became one of fearful peril.

A party of the pirates came rushing up into the gallery. It was unfortunate that the rescuing party was betrayed.

At the same moment Mut Su grasped Frank's arm, and gasped:

"May our gods defend us! They are filling the passage in our rear also. We are caged, entrapped, and death is close upon us!"

CHAPTER XXV.

LOST IN A LABYRINTH.

THE exclamation and alarm of Mut Su was well warranted. The passage through which they had come was indeed filled with pirates.

They were literally hemmed in. It was a fearful position.

For a moment not one in the party but was in a quandary.

"What shall we do?" gasped Tattle.

"Fight to the end!" said Frank grimly.

"Back the way we came?"

"No, it will never do to be hemmed in in such narrow quarters. We must be in a more open place. Come with me!"

Frank sprang across the chamber to the passage where the women and children had been.

Finding that it led on and was not obstructed, the little party of rescuers continued to fly along it.

This was proved their salvation. It gave them a bit of a start.

The Chinese foe were close behind them but they were no longer hemmed in.

Frank led the way in the mad race, and Tattle was close behind him. Mut Su was next and Barney the last, reluctant to retreat and shaking his fist ever and anon at his pursuers.

It was a strange chance that none of the pursuers had guns. No bullets came chasing after the fugitives.

But all carried swords. Should they get near enough to use these of course the result would be serious.

But the cavern now became a literal labyrinth.

Passages ran in all directions, and the fugitives were for a moment in doubt which way to go.

"Which way?" cried Tattle.

Frank hesitated.

"I don't want to get lost in this infernal hole!" he cried. "I hardly know which way to go!"

However, he chose a passage which led at right angles, and for a moment they were out of sight of their pursuers.

Then turning again into another passage at the left the fugitives doubled upon their foe. Several times they did this with gratifying success.

The Chinese were obliged to halt and listen to determine which way the fugitives had gone. This gained time for them, and what was better, the treacherous echoes of the cavern sent the foe off in another direction.

Breathless, the fugitives were now enabled to for a moment rest and recover themselves. Sinking, panting, down into some shadows, they were glad of the respite.

"Whew!" gasped Tattle. "That is a little the hardest run I ever made."

"It was a close call," agreed Mut Su. "But I think, friends, we are going to have trouble to get out of this tangle of passages."

"I think it will be confusing," coincided Frank. "The best we can do, however, is to listen for the roar of the battle outside."

This could now be faintly heard, and the periodical explosion of the shells gave the walls of the cavern something of a shock.

For some time the rescuers rested with perfect safety, for all sound of their pursuers had died out.

"Didn't we shake them handily!" cried Tattle with glee. "They might as well try to look for a needle in a haystack."

Some time passed thus. Then Frank finally proposed that they retrace their steps.

His plan was to work their way back to the outer cavern and then, if possible, learn the exact part of the pirates' den in which Myrtle Lane was held a prisoner.

But at once the rescuers found that they had a large sized contract on their hands. It was indeed a difficult task to make any headway in the inextricable tangle of the labyrinth.

Also the echoes of the distant conflict seemed to reverberate in such a way that it could not be depended on as a guide. No footprints were left in the flinty floor of the cave, and it would have been difficult to have found them in the gloom.

This was at times partly dispelled by crevices in the roof through which light shone down from the stars.

Frank had almost decided that it would be best to abandon the attempt until daylight should come, when Tattle clutched his arm and cried:

"By the great dolphin, what do you call that?"

A distant glare of light was seen. Without doubt it came from the outer cavern. By the best of luck the rescuers had worked their way back almost to the starting point.

They lost no time now in starting for the light. On they ran rapidly.

The sounds of the conflict became plainer. It was evident that Pomp and Dr. Vaneyke were giving the pirates a liberal dose of dynamite.

"Fortune favors us!" cried Tattle. "We are certainly bound to get out of here safely!"

But the words had hardly left his lips when a thrilling thing occurred.

Suddenly, just as they were passing the mouth of a side passage, loud cries filled the cavern and they were in a twinkling surrounded by dark forms.

"Trapped!" shouted Mut Su. "Fight for your lives, friends!"

Gleaming swords flashed in the gloom. Our rescuers fired almost point blank at the attacking foe.

This for a moment only held them in check. Then the Americans were forced back and in the melee separated.

Vandyke Tattle fled down one of the passages for his life. It was madness for him to attempt to hold such a force in check.

He was unable to even guess the fate of the others. He could only try to save his own life.

Being fleet of foot and aided by the shadows he eluded his foes. This brought him eventually into another side passage which seemed to lead out into a gallery in the main cavern.

"By the horn spoon!" muttered the reporter, as he paused to recover his breath. "I don't know whether I could do that thing again or not. I never came so near being nipped. I wonder how the others are? I suppose I ought to go back and see."

But on more mature consideration he decided that this would be folly.

If they had escaped they were doubtless now endeavoring like himself to find a way out of the cavern. If they were killed he certainly could give them no aid.

He decided to, if possible, find his way out of the cave and back to the air-ship. If possible while he was doing this he would endeavor to rescue Myrtle Lane.

So he kept on cautiously along the gallery. Fortunately none of the pirates were in that part of the cave, and he was enabled to proceed with safety.

Suddenly, as he was creeping along the gallery, he received a thrilling shock.

For a moment he was unable to speak or move.

A voice, soft and thrilling in its accent had reached him. For a moment he was at a loss to know where it had come from.

"Mercy, good sir! I know you are one of my countrymen. Oh! give help to a captive girl."

Tattle gave a gasp and cried: "Great dolphins! have I found you? Are you Myrtle Lane?"

"Yes, yes!" was the eager reply. "Oh! you have come to save me!"

Then Tattle turned and beheld a vision which he never forgot during the course of his life.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TATTLE'S ADVENTURES.

SET in a niche of the cavern wall was an iron-barred door. Beyond it was a chamber sculptured out of the soft limestone, and furnished with Chinese appointments.

Against the iron-barred door, and trying apparently to force her way out futilely, was a young girl more beautiful, more fairly like than any human being Tattle had ever seen.

In that moment he understood why the brute Hop Sing had been so determined to win the girl as his bride. She was a peerless prize.

For a moment Tattle stared at this picture of female loveliness, then he recovered himself.

He doffed his hat.

"I beg pardon, miss!" he stammered, "it is true that I am here to try and rescue you!"

"Then my father sent you—"

"I come from your father, and with some companions have been zealously searching these caverns. Providence has brought me to this spot."

"Indeed it could be nothing else," replied the captive girl. "And your friends—where are they?"

"I have become separated from them," and with this the young reporter told the story of the air ship and its mission.

Myrtle Lane listened with deepest interest. When Tattle had finished, she drew a deep breath, and said:

"Oh, it was indeed kind of you and your friends to come here and endeavor to rescue me. For this I am more than grateful."

"It is a service which we take intense pleasure in rendering," replied Tattle, gallantly, "but now the question is, how am I going to get you out from behind those bars?"

This did not look like an easy task. The bars were large, and to break them seemed impossible. To cut them would require the use of oil and a saw, and would take too much time.

"But do they keep no guard over you?" asked Tattle, in wonderment.

"Two Chinese have watched the door until within an hour," replied Myrtle, "then they went away very suddenly."

"The electric bombs drew them away," said Tattle; "like all the rest of the pirates, they went to find out what the matter was."

"They may return at any moment," ventured the captive girl.

"That is the point," agreed Tattle. "And I must get you out of there before they come back."

But how to do this was a conundrum. Tattle proceeded to carefully examine the door, the hinges and the lock.

"A Hercules could not force that!" he said, hopelessly. "What shall I do? If the turnkey had only been so kind now as to have left the keys—"

"I think he has!" said Myrtle, "there is a small shelf of rock out there where I have seen him place them at times together with his lantern."

"That settles it!" cried Tattle, eagerly. "Heigho! What is this?"

Down from the shelf of rock he drew a lantern and a bunch of keys. Quickly he proceeded to fit one of these to the lock.

It did not fit.

Time was precious.

One after another of the keys Tattle fitted. They would not turn the bolt.

Again and again he desperately tried the obdurate lock. It was of peculiar oriental manufacture, and nothing could be done with it.

Cold perspiration broke out over the young reporter. He was in the bleakest of despair.

"God help us!" he panted finally. "I don't see what I can do."

But the young girl was calm and resolute. She had watched him intently all the while.

"Look on the shelf and see if there are other keys," she suggested.

Tattle could have kicked himself for not having thought of this before. He reached up on the shelf and—joy! there were three large keys upon a ring.

One of these he applied to the lock. He turned it clear over, there was a clicking sound, the bolt shot back.

With a cry of intense joy Tattle flung back the door. Myrtle stepped out into the passage.

"Saved, thank God!" gasped Tattle, then his blood froze in his veins. An excited cry smote upon the air and two burly Chinese sprung out of the gloom.

In a twinkling the brave young reporter realized the situation and knew just what to do. He knew that it would be folly to attempt to outfoot the jailers with Myrtle.

But he knew that it would be possible for him to hold them at bay long enough for her to get a safe distance from the spot. So he cried:

"Run for your life! Turn to the right at the end of the gallery! I think it leads out upon the cliff! Once out there safely, hide wherever you can? We will find you!"

"But you!" gasped the young girl. "Will they not kill you?"

"Not if I can help it. At any rate, you cannot help me. Fly for your life! Go—go!"

Myrtle obeyed. She flitted away into the gloom like a wraith. As Tattle had guessed the gallery led to the cliff path.

She met nobody and kept on up over the face of the cliff and sank exhausted and fainting into a clump of bushes. There she crouched, not daring to move and praying fervently.

Tattle meanwhile left to face the two burly Chinese jailers was in truly a desperate situation.

For a moment he faced the foe and looked for an advantage. His rifle yet held one cartridge. He fired almost point blank at the first pirate. He fell instantly dead.

The second was upon Tattle like a tiger. His yataghan was lifted high to plunge into Tattle's body. But the young reporter reached up and gripped the brute's wrist.

With a quick twist he disarmed his foe. Then the struggle became hand to hand and desperate.

Vandyke Tattle was not what might be called a fighting man. Yet he was supple and athletic.

Moreover, he had the courage of a lion and knew that he was fighting for his life.

Up and down and around the gallery went the two combatants. Not a word was spoken.

But each fought silently, desperately, looking for the chance to give the death blow.

Each breathed hard, and gripped each other with all power.

But the muscles of the Chinese giant proved to be no match for the superior science and skill of the American.

Suddenly Tattle got a backlock on his antagonist and threw him. Like a giant tree the giant went down. So sharp and terrific was the fall that he struck his head against a jagged corner of the gallery wall, and his skull was crushed like an egg-shell.

Tattle wriggled out of the dying embrace of his foe.

Springing to his feet, he staggered along the gallery toward the outer air.

He knew that there was no time to lose. Already he heard voices in the distance.

He felt the draft through the gallery, and the cool air revived him. But just as he believed liberty within his grasp, the passage to the cliff was suddenly filled with dark forms, which at once surrounded him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE RESCUE COMPLETED.

WORDS cannot express the fearful sensations of the young reporter at that moment.

His struggle had left him faint and exhausted, and he could have offered no resistance. But luckily there was no need of it.

Familiar voices burst upon the night air. "Why, upon my word, it is Tattle! Thank God!"

"We thought you dead!"

"Begorra, good luck is wid us agin!"

"Friends!" gasped Tattle, joyfully,

"thank God for that!"

The meeting was indeed a joyful one to all hands. Explanations were quickly in order.

After separating from Tattle, the others of the party had eluded their assailants, and once more became fugitives in the labyrinth.

They had just emerged after many wanderings, and in time to encounter Tattle as we have seen.

In return Tattle told them the story of his rescue of Myrtle. It created a great sensation.

"Hurrah!" cried Frank. "You are a trump, Tattle! Why, it begins to look like success. Are you sure the girl came out this way?"

"Yes," replied the young reporter, "but I am not so sure but that she may again fall into the hands of the foe."

"Let us push forward then to the cliff path."

There was no other or better course and this the rescuers proceeded to do.

They soon emerged into the open air and proceeded to climb the cliff, looking carefully for a trace of Myrtle.

The air-ship still hung over the mouth of the pirates' cavern, hurling death and disaster down upon them with the electric shells.

But the cliff was free from Chinese. It was evident that all of them had sought the protection of the cavern.

The relief of the rescuing party upon emerging once more from what had come near being a death-trap for them, can well be imagined.

But where was Myrtle?

Along the cliff thorough search was made for her.

And though they little realized it several times the searchers passed very near her hiding-place. Not recognizing them in the darkness Myrtle crouched silent and trembling in the brush.

The disappointment of all was great. But Tattle was not discouraged.

"Daylight will enable us to find her!" he declared, "it is easy to see that she has crept away somewhere and does not dare to emerge."

"Do you believe she succeeded in getting out of the cavern?" asked Frank.

"Oh, yes!" replied Tattle, positively. And thus the matter rested. But Frank

was anxious to once more get aboard the air-ship.

So he proceeded to signal it.

Retiring half a mile from the brow of the cliff he drew a couple of electric globes from his pocket. These were connected with a small battery so charged that when the globes were lit they would send fanciful streams of electric sparks high in the air.

The signal was instantly seen on board the Air Dragon.

Dr. Vaneyke ceased hurling the electric bombs down upon the pirates, and cried to Pomp in the pilot-house:

"There is the signal, Pomp! Answer it!"

The darky at once obeyed.

He turned the flash light full upon the spot where the rescuers were. At once a great cheer went up from them.

Down settled the air ship.

It rested upon the ground not twenty feet from the position of the rescuers. A few moments later they scrambled aboard.

It was a joyous meeting for all. Pomp and Dr. Vaneyke listened to the story of their thrilling experiences with much interest.

It was decided to wait until daylight to resume the search for Myrtle.

"I think she is a brave and sensible girl," said Tattle, "and she will keep in hiding until daylight, and we can rescue her."

"Well," declared Dr. Vaneyke, "we have spoiled the chances of those pirates going to sea for a while. Every craft they owned is at the bottom of their harbor. We have destroyed everything that we could reach with the bombs."

"That is good," declared Frank; "it is a pity that we could not reach the dastardly crew themselves."

"That is impossible. They can hide in the cavern and it is impossible to get to them."

The air-ship now sprung aloft. It was seen that the gray light of dawn was appearing in the east.

Gradually the darkness was dispelled and morning light came. As the sun appeared above the horizon the extent of the damage done by the electric shells was seen.

The harbor was literally cleared of the pirate craft. The sands were strewn with wreckage.

Not one of the pirate crew could be seen. It was truly a scene of ruin and desolation.

"Well, doctor," said Frank, with a laugh, "I must say you did your work well."

"I don't believe they will soon forget it," said the doctor, grimly.

At this moment Barney gave a loud cry:

"Shure, there's the young leddy, sor!"

All eyes were turned downward. There, upon a little rise of land, stood Myrtle Lane signaling the air-ship. At once it descended.

She was taken aboard and the rescue was complete. To say that all on board the air-ship were in high spirits would be a mild statement.

It was decided to return at once to Yashu. The pirates had certainly been severely punished.

But at this moment Tattle, who was at the rail, cried:

"Hello! there is a flag of truce."

It was true. Upon the brow of the cliff a number of Chinese had appeared with a white flag.

Myrtle gave a cry of fear, and said:

"That is Hop Sing."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE JAPANESE PRISONERS.

INSTANTLY all eyes were fixed upon the pirate chief, Hop Sing, who was the one of the party of Chinese to hold the flag of truce.

Myrtle, in terror, would have retreated to the cabin, but Frank said:

"Have no fear. No harm can come to you now!"

Hop Sing waved the flag in an eager way, and the air ship gradually settled down to within hailing distance.

Then Frank went to the rail and shouted:

"Well, what do you want?"

Hop Sing, from his life in the American colony of Yashu, understood English well.

So he replied:

"Me wantee make friends wif Melican men. No fightee any more. Gib Melican girlee up."

"I think you will!" retorted Frank, "from sheer necessity as I see it."

"Me no pilate any more!" insisted the shrewd rascal. "Hop Sing go back to Yashu. Be goodee Chineeman allee time."

At this all the voyagers exchanged glances and laughed.

"He very likely thinks we are suckers," said Tattle. "I can hardly refrain from giving him the benefit of my rifle."

"He certainly deserves to die," cried Dr. Vaneyke; "yet I would spare him. Moreover, he carries a flag of truce."

"Correct," said Frank. "We can't play a treacherous game, though I have no doubt he would readily serve us that way."

"Oh, do not let him come aboard!" pleaded Myrtle earnestly. "I cannot tell you how afraid I am!"

"Don't fear, Miss Lane!" cried Tattle, gallantly. "He shall never cause you further trouble. I will see to that."

The young girl's face flushed a vivid scarlet and she turned a grateful glance upon the young reporter which made the blood tingle hotly in his veins.

So Frank made a stern reply to the pretended repentance of the yellow rascal.

"You contemptible scoundrel!" he cried, forcibly, "I warn you to keep out of our way. Only the honor of a flag of truce protects you now. We know your game, and let this guide you in your action."

With which Frank snapped his fingers to Barney who sprang the lever and let the air-ship leap into space.

Soon the pirate stronghold was left far behind, and the Air Dragon was making rapid headway for Yashu.

The voyagers were all now in the highest of spirits and certainly there was good reason for their being so.

They had passed safely through a most thrilling ordeal and had accomplished the main purpose of their trip, which was the rescue of Myrtle Lane.

All sat out on deck enjoying the balmy air as the Dragon sailed onward.

Suddenly Dr. Vaneyke said:

"Do you know I have a great desire to stop at Hosh Ku and see Pi Ho. I have no doubt he will be very glad to see us!"

"Indeed, we should have a warm reception there," cried Tattle. "I confess to that desire myself, yet of course we will run the risk of another collision with that bigoted general, Hi Hing."

"Hang him!" cried the doctor. "We need hardly fear him now. Again it is hardly likely that he will be there now."

"You are right," said Frank, who had been listening to all this. "If it is really the unanimous wish to stop at Hosh Ku we will do so!"

"I would like to!" declared Tattle, and the others coincided with him, even Mut Su. So it was decided to stop at the little Chinese sea-port.

But in the interim other adventures were in store. The first of a series was right at hand.

Barney, who was at the wheel, had caught sight of a scene which was being enacted upon a cliff far below, and which overlooked the sea.

A number of armed men were gathered there. They were Chinese soldiers, and in their midst were several prisoners.

"By the dragon!" exclaimed Mut Su, "they are countrymen of mine."

"Japanese?" exclaimed Tattle, "and prisoners, too!"

"It is true!"

Upon the sandy beach were drawn a number of light boats. One of these carried at its masthead the flag of Japan.

This made all at once comprehensive. The Japanese prisoners had been upon some sort of a spying expedition along the coast and had been run down and captured by the Chinese patrol.

The Celestials evidently intended to execute their prisoners for they had stripped them of their arms and were even now measuring distance to shoot them.

The aerial voyagers gazed upon the scene with interest.

Mut Su was fearfully excited. He strode furiously up and down the deck.

"It is too much of me to ask of you to intercede for my countrymen!" he said to Frank. "And yet—I cannot bear to see them die!"

"I am very sorry that I cannot intercede," said Frank, regretfully; "but you can understand that I must be neutral. They are prisoners of war. I have no right to intercede for them."

"Quite right," said Mut Su, "and yet I feel as if I ought to go to their rescue. But what can I do all alone against so many of the dogs?"

"I can hardly advise you," said Frank. "Certainly it would be inadvisable for you to attack them single-handed. You would be almost certain to get the worst of it."

But at this juncture another incident occurred which completely changed the complexion of matters.

Suddenly, from a thicket, there burst a company of Japanese marines. They carried rifles and long swords, and with a cheer charged to the rescue of their captive comrades.

How this rescuing party happened to come up so opportunely was not at the moment made quite clear.

No did the aerial voyagers endeavor to make it so. It was enough for them to know that they had come up just in the nick of time.

Naturally their sympathies were with the Japanese, and they accordingly cheered lustily.

Mut Su was beside himself with joy. He danced about the deck like a veritable East Indian dervish.

The Chinese captors, thus taken by surprise, could hardly offer much resistance. With characteristic vengefulness they began to cut down mercilessly their helpless captives.

This brutal and cowardly trick made Mut Su frantic.

He could hardly contain himself.

"Dogs of cowards!" he shrieked, "they can strike none but the defenseless. Shame to them for brutes and fiends. Let their punishment be death."

But the cowardly Chinese had time to massacre but a few of their captives when the rescuing Japs were upon them. A terrible and swift vengeance was enacted.

The Chinese were head and shoulders over the stocky Japs. But the latter were most terrible fighters and drove the yellow foe over the cliff like chaff.

Dozens of the Chinese fell beneath the unerring rifles and deep cutting swords of the Japanese.

But a brief contest was it. Then over the cliff and almost into the sea the Chinese were driven.

They scurried away through the surf in the little sampans, and this for the time ended the battle. Mut Su could stand it no longer.

He turned to Frank.

"My good friend," he said, "will you permit me to join my countrymen for a short while?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

FIGHTING ON SEA AND LAND.

OF course Frank could not refuse. So Barney lowered the air-ship. When at a height of fifty feet from the ground, a rope ladder was thrown out and Mut Su descended.

When he leaped down upon the cliff his countrymen came running toward him with eagerness and surprise.

He spoke to them in his native tongue which reassured them, and soon he was making them a fervid speech.

The Japanese soldiers cheered repeatedly and regarded the air-ship wonderingly. Mut Su evidently explained its character and its mission to them, for they also cheered it as well.

After haranguing his countrymen a while, Mut Su turned about and addressed Frank who was at the rail:

"These are marines from the Mirakima, one of our warships," he said, "the ship has drifted off shore in a fog. They came ashore to reconnoiter. When the Mirakima returns they will be all right. Ah, I see a sail now upon the distant horizon, and if I mistake not, it is her."

It was true that a sail had appeared upon the horizon.

That it was the returning warship was possible.

All now watched its approach with interest; particularly the Japanese mariners were eager.

But as the ship loomed up nearer something like consternation seized upon all. She seemed to fly the flag of the Chinese navy.

The air ship had descended to the ground. The Americans were now deeply interested in the situation.

At this juncture also a couple of scouts came in and reported a large force of Chinese coming along the shore.

Mut Su was now in a quandary.

He was of course bound to stand by his countrymen and see that they escaped safely from their predicament.

Frank was loath to become mixed up in the affair, and yet he disliked to leave the envoy in a desperate plight.

What could he do?

The situation was certainly a desperate one.

With the coming of a large land force, and the appearance of the war-ship, the fate of the little handful of marines seemed settled.

To have attempted to transport them to a safe point aboard the air-ship was, however, impossible, for it could never sustain such a weight.

The distant sound of the Chinese drums could be plainly heard. They were advancing rapidly to the attack.

Mut Su, however, was resolute, and grasping Frank's hand, said:

"My friend, I cannot ask you to become embroiled in this affair. I can only thank you for your kindness thus far and beg of you to leave me here to die with my brave countrymen, which is but my duty."

An idea occurred to Frank.

"Wait," he said, "perhaps I can save you after all."

The young inventor went aboard the Air Dragon.

He stepped into the pilot house and pressed the rotoscope lever. Up shot the light craft like a bird.

Up, up it went, until the sea and land lay below in one vast panorama.

Then numberless crafts were seen beyond—what had been the horizon when upon the surface below. Frank knew that the Mirakima blown off shore in a fog must needs be within range of vision now, if she really intended to return to the rescue of her detached crew.

And his surmise proved correct.

Not a dozen miles down the coast, and steaming along near the shore, was the little Japanese cruiser.

She would reach the cliffs yet almost simultaneously with the Chinese war-ship. Frank was much pleased.

"Let them fight it out," he said, "the Japs will win if they pursue their usual tactics."

So he lowered the Dragon. When it touched the ground Mut Su was eagerly at the rail.

"Well?" he asked. "What do you make of it?"

"Your ship is about a dozen miles below here, and making for this spot," said Frank.

The envoy gave a cry of joy.

"If you can hold the land force at bay until she arrives, you will have a fighting chance."

"That is all we ask," cried Mut Su, eagerly.

Frank now sent the air-ship up fully a thousand feet. He had no desire to participate in the affair.

With deepest interest the aerial voyagers watched the course of events.

Myrtle Lane came out of the cabin and joined Tattle rather shyly at the rail.

"I hope the brave Japanese will not be defeated," she said, "but I fear that they will be outnumbered."

"There is certainly some danger of that," admitted Tattle. "We will pray for Mut Su's success, though."

The Chinese man-of-war had already sighted the Japanese cruiser.

Each seemed eager to meet the other and they were rapidly drawing nearer together. A sea fight was a certainty.

The Japanese on the cliff had already signaled the Mirakima. Boats put out from the cruiser.

But the Chinese man-of-war hove to just in the bay and sent hot shot after them.

They were obliged to return to the cruiser, and the rescue of the force on land was thus for a time deferred.

But Mut Su was not disconcerted. He secured a position of vantage on the cliff and opened fire with the Chinese on the beach.

Thus the battle began.

The hostile vessels began to sail about in a circle, each seeking the advantage of the other.

The air was made hideous with the boom of the cannon, and soon each began to suffer damage. Masts and yards began to go by the board, splinters flew and smoke surged from certain parts which were afire.

The battle was a royal one while it lasted.

It was indeed hard to say which had the advantage. But after a while, Dr. Vandyke cried in dismay:

"Upon my word, I believe the cruiser is getting the worst of it."

This was seen to be a fact.

The big man-of-war had heavier guns, and these had begun to tell. Suddenly the cry went up:

"She is sinking!"

It was true. The Japanese vessel was certainly going to the bottom. No power could save her.

The man-of-war now ranged alongside and raked her badly. It was seen that no quarter was to be given.

And suddenly the cruiser gave a great plunge and went down. The water was filled with wreckage and struggling human forms.

All drew a deep breath. Their disappointment was intense.

Frank had struggled hard to resist the temptation to fire upon the Chinese vessel and turn the tide. But he overcame his sympathies in the interests of fair play.

"I have no right to interfere!" he said.

"We must remain neutral."

Then another astounding fact became apparent. A large body of the Chinese had overpowered the Japanese on the cliff.

They were overcome, and Mut Su, the envoy, was a hopeless prisoner.

CHAPTER XXX.

REUNITED AT YASHU.

AT no stage had Frank found it more difficult to resist the temptation to intercede in behalf of the Japanese.

His acquaintance with Mut Su had ripened into a positive liking and he shuddered now as he reflected upon the certain fate of the envoy.

To fall into the hands of the Chinese meant certain death.

That Mut Su should come to such a sad and untimely end was a source of deepest regret to the voyagers.

"Upon my word," cried Tattle, "I don't see why we ought not to rescue him."

"I suppose we have no right to interfere!" said Frank, "though I am sorely tempted."

"Is there no feasible way?"

"None that I can see!"

The victorious Chinese were apparently in high spirits over their success. The prisoners they had taken were conveyed aboard the man-of-war.

Mut Su was among them. The aerial travelers saw him disappearing in the cabin of the Chinese vessel. Then Frank said:

"I am more sorry than words can tell. Yet I am powerless to interfere. Let us try and forget it all."

The air-ship now headed for Yashu. Darkness soon settled down and it became necessary to employ the search-light.

The affair was over and the voyagers had nothing to reproach themselves for.

Yet a gloom fell upon them, and not one but would have given much to have secured the rescue of Mut Su.

However, it was war, and as neutrals they could not blame themselves so the matter was dropped.

Early the next day, Frank held the air-ship a trifle inland and Barney gave the cry:

"Shure, there's the place, sor!"

Myrtle Lane could hardly restrain her feelings of deepest joy as the quaint little town of Yashu burst upon her vision.

She knew that she was soon to be restored to her parents and this was a most joyful reflection.

Soon the air-ship hung above the place. It could be seen that a turmoil was created below.

The Chinese inhabitants rushed hither and thither in the wildest of excitement. The Europeans waved all manner of signals.

Slowly the air-ship settled down. Frank had no fear but that they would meet with a friendly reception.

He selected the little square in the center of the town, where they had alighted before as the best landing spot.

Soon the air ship rested upon the little green plot. Almost instantly it was surrounded by a wild and excited mob.

Myrtle stood on the deck and suddenly caught sight of her parents, who were madly forcing their way through the crowd toward her.

In another moment she was in their arms.

It was a joyful reunion. With tears in her eyes the grateful mother showered her thanks upon Frank Reade, Jr.

The young inventor felt more than repaid in that moment. He modestly protested against the effusive demonstration.

As for Tattle he was exceedingly glum.

"Will we not remain in Yashu a while?" he asked of Frank.

"There seems to be little need of our services here!" said the young inventor. "I had thought of pushing on to Peking. We will, however, remain here until to-morrow."

The young reporter sighed. There was a curious ache in his heart.

The truth was, there had sprung up between him and Myrtle Lane, something more than an ordinary liking.

Vandyke Tattle had never been a sentimental man. Indeed his boast had always been that of the practical man of the world.

But for once he was disposed to forego this assertion. The pretty face and soulful blue eyes of Myrtle Lane had raised havoc in his heart.

"Upon my word!" he mused, "it is queer enough that I, Vandyke Tattle, reporter, and callous to sentiment, should fall in love. For I certainly have and I would give all my old shoes for one of Myrtle Lane's smiles. But I am sure she will never care for me."

Had Tattle known the truth he would have experienced far different sensations. It was true that Myrtle reciprocated his liking.

The air-ship was surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd.

All of the Europeans in the little colony crowded upon deck and shook hands warmly with Frank.

"But for you," they said, "we should have fallen victims to the Chinese rioters. We owe you our lives."

Frank modestly disclaimed this, but was much gratified all the same.

A sort of fete was held in the little square. After this darkness fell and night came on.

The search-light made all in the little square as plain as day. Until a late hour the denizens of Yashu hung about the air-ship.

Then gradually all retired, the town became quiet, and Frank turned off the light. All retired except Barney, who remained on guard.

The Celt was not as much on the alert as usual, for he deemed all safe in the little town, for certainly they were among friends.

After a while he went into the pilot and became absorbed in an interesting book. He remained there enraptured until relieved by Pomp near morning.

And while Barney had been thus lax dark forms had been busy about the air-ship.

Not until daylight came did this become apparent to Pomp. Then, astounded, he saw that heavy cables had been twined about the propeller of the air-ship, and

were fastened to trees some distance away. The air-ship was literally anchored.

At once Pomp gave the alarm. Frank and Dr. Vaneyke, with Tattle, came tumbling out of their bunks.

"What's the matter?" asked Frank sharply. Pomp pointed to the cables.

At the same moment the roll of a drum was heard and a file of Chinese soldiers came rapidly into the square. It was a thrilling moment.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TROUBLE WITH PING YAN.

In that moment Frank saw the whole game. The air ship was secured by the cables around the propeller so that flight could not be made.

This was done no doubt by the minions of the egotistical Hi Ping Yan, the mandarin who upon a former visit had endeavored to seize the Dragon and press it into the service of the emperor.

Frank saw that there was certain to be trouble.

The file of Chinese soldiers came rapidly into the square in the early morning light. Ping Yan was at the head of them.

"Upon my word!" gasped Tattle, "they are going to try and seize us, Frank!"

"Yes," agreed the young inventor coolly. "Shall we submit?"

"No!"

There was a resolute light in Frank's eyes and an angry ring in his voice. He was much out of patience with the stupid Chinese mandarin.

"Hum!" muttered Tattle. "It begins to look as if we must have trouble with these heathens. You'll surely have to kill a few of them, Frank."

This the young inventor was much averse to doing. But yet he was determined not to give up the ship.

The Chinese completely surrounded the air-ship. By this time the whole town was aroused.

Some of the missionaries and prominent Europeans attempted to reason with Hi Ping Yan.

But they might as well have talked to stone.

The greedy eyes of the mandarin had become fixed upon the air-ship and he was determined to possess it.

In his exaggerated idea of his power and importance, he allowed his better judgment to be overruled.

Frank watched the deploying of the soldiers into the square a moment. Then he said in a steely voice:

"Barney and Pomp, take axes and cut these cables!"

"All roight, sor!" cried the Celt, with alacrity.

Pomp followed him.

The two servitors at once began work. The effect was exciting. In an instant Chinese soldiers, with drawn swords, sprung forward.

They brandished these threateningly over the heads of Barney and Pomp. This maddened the latter.

"Begorra, don't yez dare to meddle with me, yer misfit yaller dog!" yelled the Irishman, warding off the sword of one of the attacking party. "Shure, take that for your impudence!"

Straight from the shoulder the Celt sent his sturdy fist into the Chinese soldier's face. The Celestial went down as if kicked by a horse.

Pomp knocked a second over with the handle of his ax. In a moment a hand-to-hand fight was in progress.

Frank yet desisted from firing upon the Chinese soldiers. But fearful that Barney and Pomp might suffer serious injury, he now took an active hand in the affair himself.

Leaping down from the air ship's deck, he rushed between the fighting men, at the same time crying in a voice of thunder: "Back, you dog!"

His presence was so commanding, and carried such authority with it that the Chinese instinctively fell back, and there was a lull.

Barney and Pomp stood close by Frank determined to defend him with their lives, while Tattle and Dr. Vaneyke had gone to the electric gun, determined to use it if the need came.

But at this moment several men rushed into the square. The noise had brought the whole town to the spot. These men were headed, as was seen, by Mr. Lane, the leader of the colony.

With eyes flashing indignation, Mr. Lane rushed up to the Chinese soldiers and began berating them in their own tongue.

But they doggedly held their position until suddenly there was a flourish of drums, and the colonel of the corps with Hi Ping Yan, the mandarin, pompously advanced.

Mr. Lane at once sailed into them.

"What do you mean?" he cried in the Chinese language. "Don't you know that you will lose your heads for this if word is sent to Pekin? These men are foreigners, and under the protection of the American consul, and entitled to ceremonious treatment at Yashu, which is a treaty port?"

The Chinese military commander deferred to Ping Yan whose bigotry had not lessened one whit.

"This is a time of war," he said, pompously. "In defense of the Empire the subjects of the Emperor demand the use of this flying-ship. With it we can whip the Japanese."

"But it is the property of an American and under the protection of the American flag," declared Mr. Lane, vigorously. "Your Emperor does not want trouble with the United States of America. You have no right to trouble the air-ship."

The doggedness of the mandarin was not inclined to yield. He replied, obstinately:

"If the flying-ship is not surrendered at once every man aboard her shall be beheaded."

The rage of Mr. Lane knew no bounds. He stormed and raved and threatened. But it seemed to do no good.

Frank, however, now turned and gripped his hand.

"I thank you for your intervention," he said. "I see no way to avoid bloodshed. But do not fear. The Air-Dragon can take care of itself."

Mr. Lane and the representative of the American colony withdrew from the square. Frank had called Barney and Pomp aboard.

He went to the forward gun.

"Will you give them a shot, Frank?" asked Tattle. "They certainly deserve it."

"Only as a last resort," said the young inventor, grimly, "but it really looks as if it would be necessary."

But at that critical moment the keen eye of the young owner of the air-ship saw a way out of the difficulty. He was not slow to seize it.

He sprang to the gun, and turned its muzzle full upon the huge cables which bound the ship to the earth.

Several of these Barney and Pomp had succeeded in cutting. It occurred to Frank that he might sever the others with an electric bomb.

There was no time to lose.

The Chinese soldiers were coming to the charge. In another moment a number of them were at the rail.

But Frank at that moment fired the gun. The dynamite projectile struck the cables and cut them instantly. There was a terrific explosion and then the air-ship sprung upward.

Several of the Chinese soldiers were clinging to the rail. Some of them relinquished their hold and dropped. But a few waited and were in a twinkling a thousand feet in the air.

Frank and Tattle shouted to them to hold on, but they were so overcome with terror that they did not obey and suddenly dropped.

When they struck the earth they were pulp. It was a horrible fate.

But the aerial voyagers could not feel that they were to blame. The air-ship was released from its most perilous position.

"We've given them the go by this time," cried Tattle, "but really that old mandarin deserved a kicking for his perversity."

Frank smiled, for he understood well enough why Tattle was disappointed at having to leave Yashu so soon. Pretty Myrtle Lane could have told much more about it.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FUGITIVE.

THE air-ship hovered over Yashu but a few moments. Then Frank headed it up the coast.

"Now for Pekin!" he cried; "then we will cross over to Japan, and after that—"

"What?" asked Tattle, eagerly.

"Home, if it is feasible."

"It really looks as if we had accomplished about all we shall be able to here," said Dr. Vaneyke; "the interests of the colony at Yashu now seem to be all right."

"That is what I was thinking of," said Frank. "I see nothing more to detain us."

"I am satisfied," said Tattle, with averted face, "but—er—by the way—"

"Well?"

"Is there any possibility of returning to Yashu before we leave?"

"Why?" asked Frank, roguishly, "did you leave any valuable article there?"

"N—no," said the young reporter, uneasily; "it's all right. I'm willing to go along home any time."

Frank and Dr. Vaneyke exchanged glances and smiled. Then they separated.

Barney and Pomp were delighted with the prospect of being homeward bound before many days.

"Begorra, I can't say as I'm after bein' dead stuck on these pig-tailed haythins," declared the Celt. "I'd a heap rather pay a visit to ould Oireland."

"Golly! de State ob Georgy am good nuff fo' me," declared Pomp. "I jes' sot mah life by dat."

The air-ship made rapid progress up the coast.

After a while though, Frank changed its course inland, and in a direction which he reckoned would bring him eventually to Pekin.

This was the first time that the voyagers had been away from the coast, and the interior of China certainly presented a vastly different aspect.

The country seemed quite thickly settled, and villages were frequent and quite large cities not uncommon.

But yet there was certain wild tracks of country passed over, and it was after several hundred miles had been covered that the first exciting incident occurred.

The air-ship was passing over a mighty extent of jungle, when they saw a large detachment of Chinese soldiers all marching in order.

At first this held no significance for Frank Reade, Jr., but as Tattle continued to study the band of warriors he suddenly cried:

"Hello, Frank! here's a go!"

"Eh?" exclaimed Frank, in surprise.

"What is it?"

"There are some of the chaps in that army who captured Mut Su."

In an instant Frank was at the rail.

"You don't mean it!" he gasped.

"Look for yourself!"

Frank became at once satisfied that Tattle was right. He drew a deep breath.

"Poor Mut Su!" he exclaimed, "he was a good fellow, if he was a Jap. It cannot be that he is alive as he would be with them as a prisoner."

"Perhaps he is somewhere among them," said Dr. Vaneyke; "have you looked very sharp?"

But the keenest scrutiny did not reveal Mut Su.

The logical conclusion therefore was that he had been executed by the Chinese who had captured him, despite their declaration that they intended to carry him to Pekin a prisoner of war.

The Chinese army had seen the air-ship, and all seemed to be regarding it with something like excitement. One of their officers made signals with a flag.

But Frank did not answer them.

"I don't propose to take any chances by descending there," he said. "I've had all to do with the ignoramuses that I intend to have. Confound them!"

"That's where your head is level, Frank," agreed Tattle; "but I'd just like to know whether they really killed poor Mut Su or not."

"They probably would not gratify us

with the information if we asked it of them," said Frank.

"I daresay. Well, I've no doubt China will be a great country some day, but she must first emerge from the cloud of ignorance and fanaticism which is her bane. This war may mean her regeneration."

"Indeed I believe it will," declared Frank, with conviction; "but—Hello! what is that?"

The air-ship had passed nearly a mile beyond the Chinese army and was passing over a great clearing in the jungle.

And in the clearing a scene was beheld which caused all the wildest kind of a thrill.

A hundred or more Chinese soldiers were tearing through the jungle as if in quest of some one.

In the very center of the clearing stood a lone man who was dancing and leaping and waving his arms at the air-ship.

For a moment the aerial voyagers were literally dumfounded.

Then Frank gasped:

"Upon my word that looks like—"

"Mut Su!" yelled Tattle.

"It is!" screamed Dr. Vaneyke. "Lower the air-ship!"

Barney in the pilot-house heard the cry. Instantly he turned off the current.

Down sank the air ship.

Mut Su was behaving like a wild man. His joy at once more being able to join the aerial voyagers seemed beyond all control.

When the Air Dragon touched the ground, he rushed into Frank Reade, Jr.'s arms wildly.

"Don't let me fall into their hands again!" he cried. "By the soul of my father my escape was a miracle. The gods sent you to my aid just in time. Ah, look! There they come after me!"

From the jungle the pursuing Chinese soldiers sprang. They had seen the air ship descend and suspected the cause.

But Frank cried:

"Don't you be afraid, my Japanese brother. They shall not take you. Up with the ship, Barney!"

Up sprang the air ship, leaving the baffled Chinese below.

Then Mut Su told the thrilling story of his captivity and his escape. The aerial voyagers listened with deepest interest.

"I was delivered up to Gen. Chang!" he said, "and the orders were to take me to Peking to receive my sentence of death from the lips of the emperor himself."

"It seems that there is a rich bounty upon all prisoners of my rank, delivered alive in Peking. What my fate would have been if I had not escaped you can imagine."

"They would probably have flayed you alive!" ventured Tattle; "they are quite capable of it, I doubt not."

"Exactly!" agreed Mut Su, "but I kept my wits about me, and was resolved to escape if I could. So several miles back here in the jungle I managed to twist my wrists out of the rope which bound them."

"Then I grabbed the big sword of the nearest soldier and sent him spinning with a cuff over the ear. Before the others could reach me, I had cut down three soldiers near me, and then made a bold dash for the jungle and for life."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

OVER THE CHINESE CAPITAL.

"I WAS successful," continued Mut Su, with flashing eyes. "One Son of the Sun is a match for four of those lazy Chinese dogs. Almost before they knew it I was hid deep in the jungle."

"You know the rest. I ran on and on, keeping well out of their way. They could not catch me, and here I am."

"It was a plucky deed," cried Frank, "and reflects credit upon you. But you are safe with us now."

"Good!" cried the envoy, joyfully; "and you will fulfill your promise to visit Japan?"

"I will!"

This filled Mut Su with delight.

He did not demur at the proposed visit to Peking.

"It is well to have a look at the Chinese capital," he said. "Before many days it will be the property of my own people."

"Then you anticipate victory for your nation?" asked Tattle.

"I do!" replied the envoy, confidently. "Thus far our people have met with sweeping victory. It is the cry now: 'On to Peking!' Once the capital is ours you will see that China shall have a new future."

"In that case," cried the reporter, "the war will be a benefit to China. It would not be so bad an idea if both nations were united under one dynasty."

But Mut Su shook his head.

"I fear you will not see that," he said. "I hardly think our people will ever affiliate with the Chinese. We are two distinct nations, socially and politically."

It was evident that the Chinese soldiers were much disconcerted at the escape of their prisoner.

They made angry gestures and cries, and fired volley after volley at the air-ship.

Of course all this did not harm, though some of the bullets did click against the steel hull of the Dragon.

But Barney put on all speed and the Chinese were soon left out of sight. Then nightfall came.

Darkness most intense settled down. Twinkling lights from dwellings and small villages were seen like stars in the blackness below.

But nothing could be seen of the dwellings themselves or of the dwellers therein. The darkness was most intense.

The search-light was not used, and speed was shut off, so that the air ship did little more than drift all night.

Frank's reason for this was obvious. All were fatigued with the exertions of the past few days and were glad to obtain a solid night's rest.

When morning came the air-ship was floating over the surface of a mighty lake.

This covered many miles in extent, and numberless fishing-boats dotted its surface.

"This is the Lake of Tu Chien," said Mut Su. "It is very deep and a rare fishing-ground. Here are caught the silver carp which only the Emperor and certain attaches of the royal suite are allowed to eat. It is death for the ordinary Chinaman to eat silver carp."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Tattle, with interest. "What is the reason thereof?"

Mut Su shrugged his shoulders.

"The carp caught in Lake Tu Chien is sacred!" he replied. "Some ancient prophet made the law and it will always stand, so long as Chinese superstition and ignorance reign. Some of our people have strange, religious notions, but there is nothing like this law in all Japan!"

"There seems to be a good many fishing in the lake!" said Tattle.

"Oh, they are fishing for larger fish and with spears. The silver carp are caught only with silver nets and by certain officials high in government service. The fishermen of Tu Chien take good care not to lift one of the little carp out of the water!"

"How absurd!" said Dr. Vaneyke; "certainly China is a benighted nation."

Over Lake Tu Chien the air-ship drifted. Then by Frank's orders speed was increased.

It was late in the afternoon that Barney sighted a tall tower to the northward. It was one of the towers of a mighty pagoda, and beyond this a wonderful scene was spread to view. Upon the banks of a smoothly gliding river was a city, which for extent and density none of the Americans had ever seen the like of.

"Peking!" cried Mut Su. "Now you see the Chinese capital. That is the Pei Ho river."

The aerial voyagers gazed spellbound. They regarded the scene with deepest interest.

Seemingly to the horizon extended the mighty collection of Chinese houses. There were mighty pagodas and temples, palaces and mosques. The streets, however, were narrow and dingy, and literally crowded with Mongolian humanity.

The air-ship drifted over the Celestial city, while the voyagers took in all its wonderful sights. It was surely a wonderful panorama.

But even as they were thus engaged they could not help but see that the air-ship had been noted in the streets below, and a great commotion was created.

Mut Su laughed immoderately.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he cried. "They are sure it is some trick of us Japanese to destroy their city. Look at that! See the soldiers gathering and—"

Mut Su's face changed. He clutched Frank's arm.

"By the Great Dragon!" he gasped. "there is the man who rules this empire! There in that stately train is the emperor!"

Below upon the broadest thoroughfare of the dense city and near a mighty pagoda with flowering gardens, was a rich retinue and train of servants carrying upon their shoulders a richly draped litter. In this beneath a slanting silken curtain, was a Chinaman. He was truly the emperor.

The emperor's train had come to a halt and his mightiness even was looking up at the air-ship. There came up above the roar of the city the hideous din of gongs and trumpets in the temples.

The denizens of Peking were all certainly of the opinion that the dogs of Japanese, aided by the evil spirits had come upon some flying warship to devastate and destroy their capital city.

It was therefore but natural that the great capital of China should become convulsed with deadly fears and apprehensions. Troops of soldiers were scurrying about, guns began to boom, and a mighty shell sailed up and burst directly under the air-ship. The Dragon gave a lurch and began to fall.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ADIEU TO PEKIN.

As the shell burst under the air-ship for a moment it rocked and pitched violently, and then began to fall.

A fearful cry of horror went up from the voyagers. It was a thrilling and critical moment.

The result of falling into the streets of Peking at that excited moment was not to be easily reckoned. Certainly it would mean serious things for all, Mut Su especially.

"My God!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., rushing to the pilot house. "What has happened? Send her up again, Barney! Has the machinery given out?"

But in that moment the situation was luckily reversed. The air-ship suddenly ceased falling and began to rise.

Frank sprang into the pilot house, and saw at once what was the trouble. The shock of the explosion had for a moment reversed the rotoscope switch. Barney had quickly set it forward again.

This was the salvation of the air-ship and all on board. The Air Dragon sprang up a few hundred feet higher.

No shells could now reach her, and for the time she was safe. It was indeed a lucky escape, and the voyagers were all inclined to mutually congratulate themselves.

But a lively scene was being enacted below.

The Chinese were firing shells and even solid shot up at the air-ship as rapidly as they could. Of course none of these took effect.

"Upon my word!" cried Tattle, "they mean to bring us down if they can. It is hardly civil usage for such peaceably inclined people as we are."

"Ah, but they think we are Japanese," declared Dr. Vaneyke.

"That is the truth, no doubt," agreed the envoy, Mut Su.

"What, then, if they were to know that we were Americans and friendly?" cried Tattle. "Would they give us a civil reception?"

"It is possible," rejoined the envoy. "Do you wish to hold parley with them?"

"For the gratification of a certain amount of curiosity, yes!" replied Frank.

"Then," said the envoy, "I would suggest that you communicate with some of your own countrymen who find residence in Peking. If you can open communication with them they can probably get word to the Emperor, and he will send forth an edict that you may descend with safety."

"That will mean much trouble and

bother," cried Tattle. "Are you particularly anxious to descend, Frank?"

"By no means," replied the young inventor, quickly. "My wish was simply to in some way assure the Emperor that we are friendly."

"Why not drop a written message, then?" asked Dr. Vaneyke.

"Would they be able to read it?"

"They might take it to some European resident who could," suggested Mut Su.

But Frank finally hit upon what he believed to be the best plan. The air-ship hovered over the Chinese capital until directly over that part where were the residences of the foreign element.

The foreigners could be seen gathered in groups before their houses, and all engaged in watching the air-ship.

Frank let the Air-Dragon descend as low as he dared, and then he leaned over the rail and waved the American flag.

A wild cheer came up from below, and then an English and American flag were both raised on a staff in reply. The signal was understood.

But the Chinese were invading the foreign quarter in every direction. It was evidently not going to be safe for the Dragon to descend as yet.

Frank now brought a simple telegraph sounder from the cabin and attached it to a wire which he proceeded to lower to the ground.

The other end of course was connected with the battery and another instrument. As it happened, in the crowd below was a telegrapher who made no difficulty in at once establishing communication with the air-ship.

"You are Americans?" came the query over the wire.

"Yes!" Frank replied.

"No other nation could have solved the problem of aerial navigation. Does your air-ship belong to the government?"

"No!" replied Frank, "it is a private invention and private property. We came to this country for the purpose of affording protection to the beleaguered American colony at Yashu. Is your position threatened?"

"Not as yet," was the reply. "Although I would not advise you to make a landing here. It might aggravate the ignorant fears and prejudice of the Chinese. It is hard to make them think that newcomers are not foes."

"Then it will hardly be safe for us to descend?"

"Hardly."

"We then send you greeting and trust that you will become involved in no serious trouble with the heathens."

"I don't think we will, for we are under the protection of the emperor here. We return the greeting cordially. I am John Kane, secretary to the American Consul. May I ask your name?"

"I am Frank Reade, Jr., the owner and inventor of the Air Dragon. I have on board Dr. Vaneyke of Washington, scientist. Vandyke Tattle, of New York, correspondent, my two men, Barney and Pomp, and the Japanese envoy, Mut Su."

"Then that is all the more reason why I hardly think it would be safe for you to come down. Should it become known that one of your party was a Japanese official not one of you would escape alive."

"I believe you are right," returned Frank. "And thank you for the warning. I bid you adieu!"

Then he drew up the wire and turning to his expectant companion, said:

"We shall have to forego the pleasure of any sort of a sojourn in Pekin. It will mean nothing but trouble for us and that we can hardly afford."

"Right!" cried Tattle. "I for one am satisfied."

"We don't want to take undue risk!" said Dr. Vaneyke, reluctantly.

"I tell you, gentlemen," cried Mut Su, heartily, "come to Japan and we will promise you safe conduct and a hearty welcome."

There was a moment's silence.

Then Frank said:

"Is there a unanimous sentiment to that effect?"

"Yes," was the chorused reply, and Barney, at a signal from Frank started the air-ship to the southward. Pekin and

its curious buildings began to fade away in the distance.

There was some disappointment felt by Dr. Vaneyke, who had been anxious to study life in the Chinese capital.

But when he recalled the fact that Japan would afford him an excellent field, and Corea as well, he was content.

Until nightfall the air-ship kept on its way toward the coast.

It was determined to cross the Gulf of Pe Chi Li, which was really the theater of naval events between the two nations.

From the Shantung Promontory it was not a great distance across the Yellow Sea to Corea, and thence they might proceed southward to Japan.

Until a late hour the voyagers sat up on deck listening to music made by Barney and Pomp with their banjo and fiddle.

The air was balmy, and the night though dark was quiet and restful.

But finally all retired, leaving Barney on guard.

The Celt had set the lever of the air-ship so that an even speed and altitude was maintained. This left him at liberty to sit out on deck and enjoy the balmy breeze.

He seated himself by the rail and lit his pipe. Gradually he dropped into a spell of reverie.

As it was hardly likely that the air-ship could strike an obstruction Barney felt no fears of any kind. A couple of hours drifted by.

Then the Celt was aroused in a peculiar manner.

He heard the distant sound of voices. They seemed to come from the air above. Startled, the Celt sprang up.

He glanced upward at the same moment. His heart almost stood still with the spectacle which he beheld.

Down from the upper regions a monstrous object which seemed to have a pair of terrible fiery eyes was descending.

It was coming straight for the air-ship and must certainly strike it. A yell of wildest terror escaped the Celt's lips.

"Och, worra, worra, wud yez come quick, Misher Frank. Shure the devil is ather us intoirely!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE CHINESE AERONAUTS.

BUT despite his terror Barney was not wholly devoid of ideas. He made quick action.

He pressed the electric button which alarmed the ship. Then he sprang to the search-light.

He threw its rays upward and a startling sight it was, indeed, which he beheld.

There hanging directly over the air-ship was a monster balloon. The two fiery eyes Barney had seen were lanterns.

But the balloon was sinking and straight down upon the air-ship. If it became entangled with the rotascopes the result might be serious for all.

Barney yelled at the top of his lungs:

"Whurroo, yez omadhouns! Don't yez see that yez will be ather running into us? Kape off fer the loife av yez!"

An answer came back from the car of the balloon, but it was in an unintelligible tongue.

At this moment Frank Reade, Jr., and the other members of the air-ship's crew sprang on deck.

"What's the matter?" Frank cried.

But a glance showed him all. A cry of alarm escaped the lips of all.

"We are swamped!" screamed Tattle.

"Keep off there."

"Keep off!" shouted Frank. "Lower the ship, Barney—quick!"

The Celt obeyed, but it was too late. The huge car of the balloon settled between the rotascope shafts, and then the upper silken structure was punctured by the revolving blades.

Down it settled over the rotascopes in a cloud, and completely blocked them. The machinery whirled and buzzed, and would have gone to smash had not Barney shut off the current.

The Air Dragon, hampered and weighted thus, began to fall.

It was a moment of horror!

Fortunately, however, the descent was

not rapid, for the vast expanse of silk made a sort of parachute.

Should the air-ship strike the earth, however, there was a likelihood that the shock would damage the machinery.

There were two men in the car, and they were spilled unceremoniously down upon the deck.

They were Chinese.

There was no time, however, for parley or explanations. The air-ship was falling—where? Barney had presence of mind enough to turn the search-light downward.

Then it was a thrilling spectacle which rewarded the gaze of all.

Below them was water—a vast expanse. A great cry of horror went up.

"We are lost!" groaned Dr. Vaneyke, "the weight of the balloon car will carry us to the bottom!"

Frank Reade, Jr., was perhaps the coolest of all.

He knew that unhampered by any serious weight, the air-ship could not sink. To get rid of this endangering weight was then the first move.

He seized an ax, and cried:

"Give help, all! We must get that car overboard!"

A cheer went up. Seizing axes, hatchets, chisels or whatever keen-edged tool could be found, the aerial voyagers attacked the balloon car.

To cut away the ropes was the first move. But this had barely been accomplished when the air-ship struck the water.

There was a shock which nearly prostrated everyone. Then water began to rush over the air-ship's deck.

It was a thrilling and critical moment. Not one on board but believed that his last hour had come.

It seemed certain that the air-ship must sink, perhaps, in a hundred or more feet of water. But fortune yet decreed in favor of the voyagers.

The air-ship went to the bottom of the lake of water, for it was a lake into which they had descended.

But the water was shallow, not more than three or four feet deep. The larger part of the deck was, therefore, exposed.

The aerial voyagers did not drown, but it was some while before they were able to fully understand the situation.

Then Barney flashed the search-light about in all directions, and it was seen just how things were.

The shores of the lake were some distance away. The shallow spot in which the air-ship had fortunately struck, was seemingly near the center of the little body of fresh water.

But water filled the hold of the air-ship and must necessarily do some damage to the machinery. To get rid of the weight which held the Dragon down was now certainly the most necessary move.

So the aerial voyagers at once began to cut the cumbersome basket of the balloon to pieces. As fast as it was dismembered it was thrown overboard.

The two Chinese aeronauts who were much bewildered at the situation, had remained by the cabin, apparently somewhat in doubt as to the result of their peculiar adventure.

Here they remained curious spectators until the air-ship was freed of its incubance. Then pumps were put to work and the water taken out of the hold and the Dragon floated.

Fortunately the rotascopes were found to be not badly injured. The clogging remnants of the silk bag of the balloon were carefully removed.

But they were not as yet put into use for they needed some repairing, and the machinery as well must be put in order. So Frank decided to let the air-ship float on the surface until daylight should come.

"Well!" cried Tattle, with a long breath of intense relief. "We got out of that scrape most fortunately, didn't we?"

"You are right," agreed Dr. Vaneyke, "but where are the authors of all this mischief?"

The two Chinese aeronauts were seen cowering somewhat fearfully by the cabin. Frank Reade, Jr. went up and spoke to them.

But they did not understand the English tongue and made unintelligible reply.

"I can't make them understand," cried Frank. "Where is Mut Su?"
The Japanese envoy came forward at once.

"Here I am!" he replied, and he addressed the aeronauts in Chinese. The effect was exciting. Recognizing in the Japanese one of their sworn foes, the Chinese aeronauts drew their swords and with angry cries made a rush at him. That moment might have been Mut Su's last.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

OVER THE GULF OF PE CHI LI.

BUT Frank Reade, Jr., seized a stout iron bar, and springing between the aeronauts and their would-be victim beat their swords down.

"Hold!" he cried, angrily. "This is no place for warfare!"

Mut Su had retreated and now addressed the Chinese again in their tongue, explaining the situation to them. This at once altered matters.

The aeronauts put up their swords, and accepting the truce talked freely with Mut Su.

The envoy obtained from them an explanation of their appearance in a balloon in that section. Their names they gave as Hi Li and Pin Chow.

They were the makers and owners of the balloon, and it had been merely an experiment upon their part.

They had never dreamed of the existence of the air-ship or the possibility of falling in with other aeronauts or voyagers of the air.

Indeed they did not seem at all pleased with the contingency which had arisen.

They were not inclined to be social, or even friendly, and seemed to have but one desire, and that was apparently to get out of the vicinity as quickly as possible.

Frank saw this at once, and satisfied that they had not made an aerial ascension for the purpose of wrecking the air-ship, was disposed to let them go.

Hi Li and Pin Chow explained that they had not intended to run into the air-ship. But their balloon had become unmanageable and had begun to sink.

They had been unable to prevent its collision with the air-ship. Satisfied that they spoke the truth, Frank said to Mut Su:

"Tell them we wish them no harm. They can go ashore at any time they please if they know of any way to get there."

Mut Su imparted this information to the Chinese aeronauts. At once they started for the rail of the air-ship.

"Where are you going?" asked the astonished envoy.

They explained in their native tongue that they were able and willing to swim ashore.

"What? all that distance?" gasped Mut Su.

By way of reply the aeronauts cleared the rail and were quickly out of sight. They swam with the ease of water ducks.

And this was the last seen of them. Until morning the air-ship floated on the surface of the little lake.

But all hands were busy all that while drying and cleaning the machinery. At daybreak the Air-Dragon was once more ready for flight.

She was not much the worse for the thrilling experience which might have been her destruction.

Up from the water she rose like a mighty water fowl. Once more a course was set to the eastward.

Suddenly as the aerial navigators were at the rail Frank cried:

"Yonder is the Yellow River or the great Hoang Ho."

"The Yellow River!" cried Dr. Vaneyke, "that is the mighty stream whose course was changed."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Tattle.

"It used to empty into the Yellow Sea, but now discharges its muddy current into the Gulf of Pe Chi Li."

"Why was the course of the river changed?" asked Tattle.

"For some agricultural purpose, I believe," replied the scientist. "Doubtless to irrigate a region nearer the capital, and perhaps more productive."

"It must have been an exciting time when the current of the mighty stream was diverted," declared Tattle.

"Indeed it was!"

As they drew nearer the river now a mighty stretch of country was spread to view.

Upon the shores of the stream, upon islands in its midst, and vast low-lying tracts bordering there were great plantations of rice.

Upon the river current were thousands of sampans, or small boats. In large coves, or bayous, there were innumerable small houses built upon stakes driven in the mud.

"These people are regular water birds!" cried Tattle.

Dr. Vaneyke laughed.

"Now," he said, "you can understand why those fellows were so willing to swim ashore last night."

The air-ship drifted along down the course of the Hoang-Ho. Wonderful sights were spread below.

But finally the boundless waters of the sea burst into view.

"The Gulf of Pe-Chi-Li!" declared Frank. "To our right is the Promontory of Shantung. Upon that promontory we shall see the great fortress Wei-Hai-Wei."

Out over the great Chinese gulf the air-ship drifted along the coast of Shantung for hours.

There were myriads of Chinese craft upon the waters of the gulf. But little was seen of war ships.

Suddenly Frank called attention to distant smoke upon the horizon. Also a faint sound of thunder could be heard.

"I believe there is a naval battle going on off there!" he declared. "It certainly sounds like it."

"Indeed!" cried Tattle, eagerly. "Let us bear down that way!"

"Ugh!" exclaimed Dr. Vaneyke. "I don't know about that. Our experience thus far has been rather unpleasant with naval engagements."

"But we need not get within reach of the guns!" pleaded Tattle.

"All right," agreed Frank. "We will see what is going on!"

So the air-ship's course was changed; she bore down toward the distant cloud of smoke.

And as she drew nearer, suddenly above the horizon, the forms of the battling ships could be seen.

There were six vessels in all, three Japanese and three Chinese. They were ironclads.

As they carried modern rapid fire guns, the din was most tremendous. Shells were bursting in the air, and hot shot were ricocheting over the waves in all directions.

The air-ship drew as near the scene as possible, and the voyagers observed the battle scene through powerful glasses. It was, indeed, a wonderful and exciting spectacle.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN EXCITING SEA FIGHT.

WORDS can hardly describe the situation in all its lurid fierceness, its vivid detail, its roaring, thunderous magnitude.

A sea fight between modern ironclads is a spectacle once seen never to be forgotten.

The aerial voyagers, suspended at a safe distance in air, could with impunity view the mighty scene as the six vessels poured iron death into each other.

Three were Chinese, and three Japanese. Far to the southward was the Shantung Promontory and the forts of Wei-Hai-Wei. But these forts were far out of range, and could take no part in that fearful duel in the Gulf of Pe Chi Li.

The impact of the heavy shot against the stout armor of the ships could be heard even at that distance, and Dr. Vaneyke could not help an exclamation:

"Upon my word, I don't see what prevents those ships from going to the bottom in short order. The armor must be of stout stuff."

"Indeed, I was thinking of that same thing myself," declared Tattle, with his inevitable note-book in hand. "This is interesting, though, for the fact that iron-

clads of this type are meeting in battle for the first time."

Mut Su was leaning over the rail, watching the battle earnestly and apparently praying for the success of his countrymen. For some while the battle raged.

At times the dense clouds of smoke nearly hid the vessels from view.

Suddenly one of the Japanese vessels was seen to list badly.

A groan burst from Mut Su. He was terribly excited.

When an ironclad gets a wound of serious sort, its career is terminated very speedily.

Unlike a wooden vessel, it cannot float until water logged, but must go to the bottom at once.

And so it was with the crippled cruiser. It was in sight but a few moments longer. As it went beneath the waves, it seemed as if all the other vessels were concentrating their fire upon it.

There was a terrific explosion which might have been the vessel's magazine or the upheaving of her decks, and then the water shot up many feet into the air in a column and all was over.

That is, so far as that vessel was concerned. But the others continued hammering at each other vigorously. It was now three to two, and the advantage largely with the Chinese.

While their vessels were warships, the Japanese craft were cruisers. Matters looked dark for Japan.

Mut Su began to pace the deck violently. He was in a very much excited frame of mind.

"Oh, if I could only be there for a moment," he exclaimed. "They need more spirit, more snap. Confound them! They must not let those dogs of Chinese whip them!"

Shot and shell flew thick and fast. Smoke so enveloped the contending vessels that for a time little of them could be seen.

Then a great cry went up.

"Whurroo!" cried Barney. "Shure it's the Chinese as get it in the neck this toime."

This was true. One of the Chinese ships, battered all to a wreck, drifted out of the circle of smoke.

It did not sink, but it was unable to fire a gun or to use its machinery. It was now even up between the combatants.

How the contest might have ended it is difficult to guess. But at this moment four more Chinese vessels suddenly loomed up on the scene, from the direction of Wei Hai Wei.

Of course this put a new face on matters at once.

The Japanese were valorous, but they would have been worse than fools to have endeavored to hold their own with such overpowering numbers.

Their province now was to extricate themselves from the muddle they were in as gracefully and quickly as possible.

This they fortunately were enabled to do, for the fact that their vessels were cruisers, and consequently lighter and swifter than the Chinese.

Swiftly they drew out of the conflict, yet dealing telling shots all the while. The triumphant yells of the Chinese could be heard even at that distance upon the deck of the air ship.

"Hurrah for the brave Japanese!" cried Tattle, "they are drawing out of the scrape wonderfully well. All honor to your countrymen, Mut Su."

"Thank you!" replied the envoy with pleasure. "Your expression of good will is very kind. I hope our men will do their duty, even though they may be defeated."

"They can easily outrun those big warships!" declared Dr. Vaneyke.

"Ah, but that is not all," cried Frank, "they must outsail those other ships which seem bound to hem them in."

This was seen to be a thrilling fact. The new-coming ships had spread out to intercept the escape of the Japanese vessels from the Gulf. Matters began to look doubly exciting.

The Japanese cruisers had no trouble in running away from the big war-ships. But among the Chinese new-comers were several fast sailing vessels.

So that it now became a race between

them, and an exciting race it was to be sure. Our aerial voyagers watched it with breathless interest.

The Japanese cruisers crowded on all steam. The Chinese vessels pressed in to intercept them.

As they drew closer, a running fire was kept up.

The Japanese responded, but they were obliged to crowd in nearer to the shore to avoid being cut off.

This was just what the Chinese wanted, as it would force the Japs nearer to Wei Hai Wei and the heavy and deadly guns of the fort.

Matters looked black for Japan. But Mut Su only smiled grimly, and said:

"You will see. Some of those Chinese ships will go to the bottom."

The words had barely left his lips when an incident occurred which explained what he meant to the others.

Suddenly, and with lightning swiftness one of the cruisers changed its course.

Straight for a Chinese war-ship it headed, and before the unwieldy craft could get out of the way, there was a terrific crash and the cruiser's ram had pierced its armor like cheese.

A ringing yell went up from the cruiser's deck as the Chinese ship dropped astern, and began to fill. In a few moments she went to the bottom.

This changed the complexion of things at once.

The other Chinese vessels were wise enough to keep aloof, and contented themselves with hurling shot at the swift adversaries which had as little effect upon them as water upon the back of a duck.

The two cruisers scurried to sea with a lucky escape from a bad trap. They were soon but specks upon the horizon.

While the Chinese fleet pulled itself together and began to count its hard knocks and bruises.

It was not exactly a victory for them, though they had driven the invaders away.

They had lost two of their best vessels, which was no light matter. The Japanese had lost one.

Altogether it had been a plucky combat on both sides, and the aerial voyagers gave a cheer for Japan out of honor to their distinguished friend and fellow passenger, the envoy Mut Su.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE SERPENTS' DEN.

THE air-ship now floated on and over the fortifications of Wei Hai Wei. These were of great interest.

All were surprised at their extent.

They were really the most powerful fortifications in that part of the world. It seemed as if they ought to be impregnable.

"Your people will have trouble to capture that place, Mut Su," said Tattle to the envoy.

But Mut Su smiled.

"Wei Hai Wei will be in the possession of Japan within a month!" he declared.

And his prophecy was fulfilled as after events proved.

The air-ship kept well up out of the way of the fortifications so that no stray shot might reach it.

But with a powerful glass all could plainly be seen below.

After an hour spent thus in study of these wonderful defenses, the Air-Dragon stood out to sea.

"Now for fair Japan!" said Frank.

Mut Su was delighted.

"You shall see what a welcome our people will give you!" he declared; "the emperor will do you honor!"

The Air-Dragon made rapid progress across the Yellow Sea, and in a few hours land once more came to view.

This as all knew was the coast of Corea. Now Corea is one of the strangest nations on the face of the earth.

It is the land of queer customs, odd people, and curious religious prejudices. Dr. Vaneyke was interested in the project of crossing the peninsula.

"Keep as near the earth as possible, will you, Frank?" he asked. "I would like to study up the manners and customs of some of these queer people."

Frank agreed to do this.

But as the air-ship got fairly inland, darkness began to shut down. As Dr. Vaneyke's desire could not be gratified after dark it was decided to select some good spot and camp until daylight should come again.

Mut Su, of course, regretted the loss of time, but yet did not demur.

They were now some distance inland, and in a wild region, where it was believed that there were no inhabitants.

It was not known that the inhabitants would be unfriendly, yet it was deemed best not to run any risk, for Mut Su declared that there was no little peril to be incurred.

The spot selected for the camp was in the verge of a deep jungle. The Air-Dragon rested upon the soft earth by the bank of a little stream.

It was believed that the tall grasses of the jungle would effectually hide the air-ship's lights, and that they would be safe from detection here.

Barney and Pomp collected some fuel and started a fire to keep away the gnats and poisonous flies which infested the air.

The air was balmy and soft, and all delighted in sitting out on deck until a late hour.

They smoked and conversed in a jolly way until near midnight. Then Dr. Vaneyke arose, and said:

"Come, boys, let's go to bed!"

But at that moment Pomp, who had strolled aft along the deck, came running back with a yell of terror.

"Fo' de Lor' sakes!" he gasped. "Sabe dis chile!"

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Frank sharply.

The excited darky sought refuge behind Frank and cried:

"Massy, Lordy! Dis chile am 'fraid ob a snake! Fo' de Lor' sakes, look out fo' yo'self, Marse Frank!"

At that moment Frank, as well as the others, saw the cause of the darky's alarm.

A sinuous form was wriggling across the deck.

A great cry went up:

"A snake!"

Barney threw the search-light along the deck.

The sight was an astounding one.

There was the monster reptile coiled with the cry of warning. Back of him, and having come aboard by means of the gangway, were a score of others.

They literally lined that side of the deck.

It was a startling sight.

They were hissing and darting their savage heads hither and thither in an angry manner.

"The cobra!" exclaimed Mut Su. "We have dropped into a nest of them!"

This was the literal truth.

This deadly reptile, the curse of the Orient, is especially prevalent in the jungles of Corea.

The reptiles had been attracted from all parts of the jungle by the bright lights of the air-ship.

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Vandyke Tattle, retreating to the cabin door. "I can't say that I want to make their acquaintance."

Barney, who was more courageous, picked up a club.

"Begorra, I'll foix the bastes!" he cried.

But Mut Su interposed.

"No, no!" he cried. "Don't attempt it! If they strike you, it will be your death!"

"Bejabers, I'll not give them toime!" cried the Celt.

"Ah, but you cannot be quick enough. They will strike you. An ordinary club won't kill one of them."

"Stand back, Barney," commanded Frank. "We can't afford to lose you. But how are we to get rid of the reptiles?"

"Ugh!" exclaimed Tattle. "I can't say that I want them for bed-fellows."

"Nor me either!" said the doctor.

At this moment Pomp came out of the cabin with a shot gun.

He fired at one of them, and blew him into fragments. Several were dispatched in this manner.

But more were coming up the gang plank. There seemed fully half a hundred of them.

What was more, as Barney flashed the search-light over the rail, the sight which was beheld was an appalling one.

The ground was literally alive with the monsters.

It seemed as if hundreds of them had come out of the jungle. The air-ship was literally in a den of the serpents.

Dr. Vaneyke and Tattle climbed upon chairs. Barney and Pomp retreated to the pilot-house.

In despair Frank turned to Mut Su, the envoy.

"In mercy's name, what are we going to do?" he cried. "How shall we get rid of them?"

"I should think the first and best move would be to get out of this vicinity," said the envoy.

"Right!" cried Frank.

He sprang into the pilot house.

A touch at the lever and the air-ship sprang into the air.

Some of the serpents tumbled back to the earth, but there were yet fully half a hundred upon the deck.

How were these to be got rid of?

This was a question which for a time puzzled the aerial voyagers.

To shoot them would mean a tremendous expenditure of powder and shot. But Frank Reade, Jr.'s inventive faculties came to the rescue.

"I have it!" he cried.

He at once proceeded to put his ideas into execution.

It very speedily became a sorry moment for the cobras that they had found the temerity to invade the deck of the air-ship.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WHICH ENDS THE TALE.

FRANK's theory was an original and an effective one.

He procured a long wire from the cabin, and putting on some insulated gloves, connected it with the dynamos.

This charged the wire so heavily that it must become destructive to human or animal life instantly.

With this wire he was enabled to reach the reptiles at a safe distance.

A touch of the wire was sufficient to kill each serpent in turn. They had but to strike it with their fangs to find little time to regret the procedure the next moment.

One after another the reptiles were thus disposed of.

Barney followed on behind and threw them overboard as fast as they were thus killed.

Consequently, in a very short time the deck was cleared. The great peril was done away with.

It need hardly be said that all drew a breath of relief.

Tattle even would not be convinced that all were disposed of and persisted in continuing the search.

It was well that he did so, for one of the reptiles was found later in the cabin where it had managed to crawl.

It was dispatched, and then all retired for the night.

It was not deemed best to return to the earth, and consequently anchors were put out and the ship hung in mid-air until day-break.

The trip across Corea proved a very interesting one.

Many strange sights were witnessed; many curious people seen. Dr. Vaneyke gathered much of interest to him, and Tattle embellished his note-book most richly.

Across the peninsula the air-ship passed, and then hung over the Japan Sea.

Speed was put on, and before night the shores of lovely Japan burst into view.

Mut Su was the happiest being on the earth to once again view his dear native land.

The Flowery Kingdom proved all that the voyagers had anticipated.

Slowly the air-ship drifted across the island to its eastern shore, where were the cities of Yeddo and Yokohama.

The visit of the Air Dragon to Tokio was an event which none can ever forget, either the voyagers themselves or the natives.

They were received with great ceremony by the emperor at his palace, and were the heroes of the hour.

The flying air-ship was a marvelous object to the Japanese.

The emperor was keenly delighted with it, and ventured to take a short sail in the clouds with Frank Reade, Jr.

He offered a fabulous sum for it, or for the secret of its invention. But Frank smilingly declined.

"I am an American," he said. "I cannot sell you the secret. If I were to sell it ever, it must be to my own government."

The emperor was bound to acknowledge this as loyal, despite his desire to own the air-ship.

After being feted and dined and honored to the extreme by the Japanese, Frank declared to his companions:

"Well, now that we have accomplished all that we can in this part of the world, are you not all ready to go home?"

"Ay!" was the unanimous cry. "Any time that you wish to start, Frank."

So, after bidding a ceremonious adieu to the emperor, to Mut Su, and all Japanese friends, the aerial voyagers went aboard the Air Dragon, Frank switched the lever on, and the air ship sprang into the air.

Homeward bound! Those are ever magic words, and after their long absence in for-

eign lands, the voyagers were all willing enough to get home.

Across the Pacific the air ship held its way swiftly. Frank had decided to proceed at once to San Francisco direct.

Tattle had announced his desire to take leave of the party at the Golden Gate.

"Why so?" asked Frank, in surprise.

"You will need to go to New York."

"Yes, but I can go thither by rail."

"But if you go with us to Readestown, you will save time and get to New York much quicker."

Tattle could not deny this, yet he still insisted upon being left at San Francisco.

It was some while before he mustered up sufficient courage to explain his reasons to Frank.

"You see," he finally confessed, "the Lanes are coming home and will be in San Francisco about that time. To tell the truth, Myrtle and I are to be married."

"I congratulate you," said Frank warmly. "Our voyage has not been without its little romance then after all, has it?"

Tattle blushed and thanked his friend, and the subject dropped. At San Francisco Tattle took leave of his fellow voyagers.

Then the air-ship went on to Reades-

town, where the voyagers were welcomed home.

Dr. Vaneyke at once went on to Washington with his collection of specimens and scientific data.

Barney and Pomp were glad to get back to Readestown once more, and were welcomed by many of their cronies.

"Begorra, but I've no use any more fer the Chinese," declared Barney. "Shure, Chiny is not in it wid Ameriky at all at all."

"Dat am a trooful fac', sah," agreed Pomp. "Ise jes' sassified to stay right yer on Uncle Sam's ground."

Frank proceeded to take the Air-Dragon apart and break her up, for she had stood a long voyage and would not be likely to go another like it.

The delicate machinery had nigh wore out. But this did not disconcert him, for he at once began work upon another invention fully as wonderful.

Perhaps we shall be able to tell the reader what it is at some future day, and with your kind permission we will now write.

[THE END.]

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